THE BOLTED DOOR

GEORGE GIBBS

X mas 1914.

Hazel Holcombe

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The Bolted Door

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

ILLUSTRATED

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TO
THE FELLOWS AT THE INN

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THE BOLTED DOOR

CHAPTER I

A WILL—AND A WAY

"* * * And it is further my will, that if my niece, Natalie Judson, and Brooke Garriott, nephew of my deceased wife, shall intermarry, they shall become entitled to my entire residuary estate of any and every kind whatsoever, whether real or personal, on such terms as are hereinafter stated. But in the event of the said Natalie Judson and Brooke Garriott failing to marry within a year after my decease, I give, devise and bequeath my said residuary estate, absolutely and in fee simple, to the charitable institutions hereinafter mentioned."

Miss Judson had read the letter and enclosure with increasing incredulity and dismay. But the precisely formal terms of Mr. Northrop's note left no room for doubt in her mind as to the final disposition of the estate of her eccentric relative. The papers slipped from her nerveless fingers to the floor. So these were the "prospects" for which she had been so carefully nurtured, come to realization—this was her Uncle Oli-

ver's last little joke. She could understand better now his generosity to her alone; the luxury with which he had surrounded her during the years of her girlhood and young womanhood; his quiet enjoyment of her success in the world of fashion, as he reared her in the home of his earlier austerities, denying her nothing that would add to her bloom—a beautiful parasite on the bulky root-stock. All these things he had given her that he might make a better joke of her dispossession. It was odious!

And the alternative to poverty and squalor—Brooke Garriott!

She recalled the visit to the home of Aunt Sophronia's forbears in the small Ohio town, and the common little boy who used to pull her hair and throw mud on her frocks. She had never seen him since then. That also was a part of Uncle Oliver's little joke. In the light of this revelation, many other things were made clear to her. She recalled the painful scenes between her uncle and his wife—the pall of gloom which had descended for a brief period upon the household at Aunt Sophronia's death, to be dispelled by a wild gayety and rough humor, misunderstood and unappreciated. She remembered, too, scraps of conversation over the dinner-table, at the one meal they shared, when he had given her his extraordinary opinions upon the subject of matrimony. Most marriages, he claimed, were inventions of the Devil, who threw people at each other's heads willy-nilly; that love, on the contrary, ran by opposites, and should begin most safely with a little aversion. He

had once confided to her that he planned to set apart a share of his fortune to endow a sanely-conducted matrimonial bureau, in which a committee, chosen by his executors, should select and apportion the eligibles.

He had always announced his most impossible projects with a serious mien, and Natalie had never known whether to be amused or alarmed. He had cared for her in his curious way, and she had felt that, whatever happened, her future, at least, was to be secure. But this! The tardy gratitude for his years of care and attention, the belated affection that had flowed forth in tears at his death were hers no more, and the springs of her charity were dried at their source. To have planned such a fate as that to which he had assigned her showed a refinement of cruelty of which she had not believed him capable.

Miss Judson pushed her chair back from the breakfast tray, her coffee and eggs untasted, and rang a bell.

"Take this away," she said, when her maid appeared.

"But, mademoiselle has not touched——"

"Take it away."

The face of the girl wore an injured look. Her mistress used that tone sometimes when she had been dancing late. Leontine shrugged her pretty shoulders and obeyed. At the door she paused.

"Will mademoiselle see Mrs. Kempton? She has just come inquiring."

"No; say I'm ill." Miss Judson paused, in doubt. "Wait! Yes; you may tell her to come up," she cor-

rected, and then sank back amid her laces and pillows, a pretty thundercloud of petulance and temper.

Abby Kempton entered, bringing the outdoor air with her, booted for a ride in the park. Houses of mourning had no terrors for her, and this one was less dreadful now than when its former owner scowled at her from the study doorway. Oliver Judson had not approved of Mrs. Kempton. Natalie offered a pale cheek to her visitor's breezy caress, and tried to smile a welcome.

"I'm glad you stopped in," she said languidly. "I'm out of sorts."

"Are you really glad? You need cheering up, my dear. I thought you might take a turn in the park with me."

"I don't think I'll ride for a few days."

Mrs. Kempton sniffed.

"Deference to the dead! Why do we defer to people dead when we never deferred to them living?"

"That isn't precisely true. I could never understand Uncle Oliver—no one could—but I respected his wishes, when they weren't too extravagant, and when——"

"When they weren't inconvenient?" laughed the gay lady. "Oh, you've nothing to reproach yourself with. You've been too virtuous to be interesting—no cigarettes—and you've even scorned the Kempton cocktail. What more could the most exacting relative require?"

"I don't like cigarettes; I'd smoke if I did."

Abby Kempton took a thin and very dainty gold case from one pocket, a gold match-safe from another:

"Have one?" she bantered. "Don't mind, do you? I'm perishing for a smoke. The king is dead, you know."

Miss Judson nodded.

"For my part," her visitor went on lightly, her half-closed eyes examining the glowing tobacco, "I think mourning should be left to the lower classes—they really enjoy it—it's a kind of dissipation. With us," and her ringed hand made a comprehensive gesture, "mourning isn't nearly as fashionable as it used to be. Crêpe is so dreadfully gloomy. You won't agree, of course, because you look handsome in it. I don't. It washes me out, and makes me look like the mourned instead of the mourner. It gives me the horrors. Oh, I don't want any one to go into mourning for *me*."

"No one ever will, unless you change your views, Abby dear," sighed Miss Judson. "One can't afford to fly in the face of convention."

"It's convention that flies in the face of *me*. But I don't care. I do what I please. If Jack doesn't mind, it's no one else's business."

"Jack is a rare husband."

"He is. He understands me. I understand him. Each of us goes his own way—but we're awf'ly fond of each other, really."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Kempton eyed her companion quizzically. "Don't you think Jack and I are happy?"

"Oh, I suppose so. But you make a false impression. You're quite a lot more decent than you want people to think you are."

"Thanks. You're beautiful—you can afford to be virtuous. I'm only pretty. My vices are the only things that save me from social extinction."

"What nonsense you talk! And why waste it on me? I'm hardly in the humor——"

Mrs. Kempton fell to her knees and took Miss Judson's hands in both of hers. "Forgive me," she pleaded. "I forgot, Natalie. Do you really miss him so?"

Miss Judson, frowning, looked out of the window, and her lips compressed.

"No, no," she said, with a quick intake of the breath. "It isn't that—not Uncle Oliver. He has treated me abominably."

"Abominably!"

"I—here, read!" She stooped to the floor, gathered up the scattered papers, and thrust them into Abby Kempton's hand. "See if you think I deserved it."

The visitor read, wide-eyed, gasping a cry of amazement as the purport of the document was revealed to her.

"This jargon—I hardly understand—what does it mean? Who in the world is Brooke Garriott?" she asked breathlessly.

"My future husband," returned Natalie, calmly ironical. "How do you like the name?"

"Is it a joke—or what? I never heard of him. You can't mean——"

"I do. It's that—or disinheritance. Can't you read? That is my uncle's will, or part of it. He

thought I'd die a spinster, so he carefully arranged a marriage for me. Kind, wasn't it?"

"It's horrible. What a terrible old man!"

"If I refuse, the money goes to indigent cats, and I go to—to—to typewriting."

Mrs. Kempton's glance fell to the pink tips of Miss Judson's carefully groomed fingers, and followed to the dainty silk and laces of her "matinee."

"You!" She dropped into a chair and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks. She was surprised that Miss Judson resented it.

"You must forgive me, Natalie dear. But it's too absurd. You a typewriter! Why, it would make your fingers blunt."

"And my morals, probably. I could do it, though."

"But you won't," cried Mrs. Kempton suddenly, seriously. "Jack wouldn't permit it. Nor would I. You'll come to us—until——"

"Until I'm married? To whom—Winthrop Townsend? You've always considered him, you know."

"Oh, Winthrop isn't bad; but the mere fact that he has become a necessity makes him impossible. And as for Brooke Garriott, if he were handsome as a god, honorable as Cato, admirable as Crichton, he'd still be the one man I would hate. Any girl would. One doesn't like one's husband served *en brochette*."

Mrs. Kempton smiled. "And yet they do it abroad," she ventured. "If your young man were an Italian prince, perhaps you wouldn't be so scornful."

"But he isn't. He's a mill-hand or something dread-

ful—an engineer in one of the railroad shops in Pennsylvania. He used to be a fireman on a locomotive—you know the grimy people in dirty overalls one sees hanging from their engines at the end of a journey—ugh!"

The shudder was so genuine that it echoed in her visitor.

"Oh, Natalie, what possessed your uncle to do such a thing? He must have been mad—stark mad!"

"He was. I haven't a doubt of it. He used to provoke me into a kind of blind rage, just because he liked to see me so. He liked the color in my cheeks, he said. He was testing me all the time. I know it now. I wish I had known it then. What he used to do to Garriott, I can't imagine, but it must have been something of the sort. I know uncle used to tease him, too. He never bothered people he didn't care for. He wanted to see the sparks fly. That was his way of showing affection."

"Brute," muttered Abby Kempton.

"I remember once," Natalie mused, "Uncle Oliver telling me of a quarrel they had. I don't know why I should think of it now, but I do. Garriott was out on the railroad testing an engine for the company. Something was the matter—they couldn't make the speed required. So Garriott climbed out on the running-board, with the temperature below zero, and lay there for three hours, playing the hose on the axle (or whatever it was that had gone wrong) to keep it cool. When they got in he was frozen fast, but they arrived on time. He got a promotion for that—also pneu-

monia. Uncle Oliver was furious. When Brooke was getting better, uncle went to see him at the hospital, and they had a quarrel. 'He was a fool,' Uncle Oliver said, 'to run a chance of death for some other man's mistake.' Brooke thanked him, but said he'd do it over again if he had to. Uncle wanted him to stop working with rowdies, come to New York, and go in his wool business. Brooke said his friends were not rowdies, and told Uncle Oliver that he and the wool business could go—ahem—to the devil."

"How very interesting! He has spirit."

"Brooke Garriott won. He said Uncle Oliver had insulted his friends, and he made him apologize."

"And he wouldn't leave the railroad?"

"No; he's there yet—grimier and more rowdyish than ever, I suppose."

"You've never seen him?"

"Not since I was a child. Don't you see what a position it places me in? He's rough, that's sure, also stout and probably moist. I never saw a man on a locomotive who wasn't. Uncle Oliver never set much store by appearances in men, though he did like women to be pretty."

Miss Judson preened at her hair with her long, rosy finger-tips. "Not that it matters a great deal," she went on, "so long as he's decently civil to me; but he'd hardly dare to be disagreeable. He has never been in New York, as far as I'm aware. He's too busy, he says. I fancy he must come now to talk things over—to talk *me* over"—she rose abruptly and walked furiously to the window—"to look me over, to

see if I will do." She broke off angrily. "Oh, can't you see how impossible it is? Do you think I could allow myself to be sought by such a man—under such conditions? I'd die first."

"But how very romantic! If you only could——"

"What?" She faced her visitor.

"Learn to——"

"Never. I'll marry Winthrop Townsend first—or—someone else."

"Réné? He's poor as Job." Mrs. Kempton sighed. "Oh, well, perhaps you're right. I'd like to see this Garriott, though."

"So should I, if only to show him how much I despise him."

"How can you despise a man you've never met?"

"I do. Why are you so impervious? Have you no thrill of friendly sympathy for a woman's injured pride? That I could hold myself so cheap! That I should sell myself to—to a workman. If he comes here to see me, I'll insult him. I can do nothing less."

Mrs. Kempton had lit another cigarette, and was silently contemplating the shiny toe of her riding-boot, as she tapped it lightly with her crop.

"I think you're making a mistake," she said gently. And then, as there was no response, she queried suddenly, "Is he tall?"

"I believe so."

"And dark?"

"No, fair. As a boy he had a tow-head and freckles —I remember that. He was an odious boy. He once

broke my talking-doll to see where the squeak came from."

"He doesn't sound promising. Still, much may be done with a tow-head and freckles if you catch them young," she paraphrased. "That's Nina DeWitt's theory, and you know she really *made* Tommy McCall."

"Or marred him—opinions differ. But I'm not a charitable institution."

"What is his age?"

"Twenty-seven."

Abby Kempton made a ring of smoke, and then poked her finger through it.

"Do you really think," she asked, "that he's—er—grimy—*all* the time?"

Miss Judson stormed angrily up and down the room.

"How should *I* know? Isn't it reasonable to suppose so? People who have anything to do with machinery are always grimy."

"That's true; but you've never minded Jack Kempton when he's been tinkering with the motor."

There seemed to be no reply to that, but Miss Judson found one that was conclusive.

"Jack is a gentleman."

"Thanks, awfully. Jack isn't bad at all. I see I'm a poor missionary. I'll be off." She drew on her gauntlets with a business-like air, and kissed the clouded brow of her companion. "Do nothing rash, Natalie dear. I'm afraid you'll find it difficult to define the word 'gentleman' nowadays. I know what you

mean, of course. I'd be a heretic if I didn't—one must hold to the traditions of one's class—but are you sure the definition actually defines? All men are brutes, my dear, just as all women are angels. It is merely a question of the degree of their brutishness. Think it over. I may be mistaken, but your personal male devil may not be so black as you've painted him. I like his spirit. Perhaps without his overalls——"

Natalie's hands went up in horror.

"Don't!" she cried. "Oh, I know. He'll be clean, slick and shiny, redolent of soap-suds, smelling of the queer, cheap perfumery of the barber's shop—that's the way habitually dirty people announce their renovation. If he could wear his overalls, I might meet him on even terms; but with his local color missing, I'll be at a loss—as much at a loss as though he were the vegetable-man or the piano-tuner."

Mrs. Kempton tossed her cigarette into the fire-place. "I see you're resolved."

"I am—desperately. Good-by, darling. I'm in a wretched humor. I hope you'll forgive me. You understand, though, don't you?"

Mrs. Kempton went down the stairs more soberly than she had come up them. She was quite sure she understood Miss Judson, but she was wondering how she would have felt in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER II

LOCHINVAR

ALL women are handsome while they dress their hair. The lithe arms, and slim, deft fingers have a grace peculiar only to the propitious hour of self-adornment. If Brooke Garriott, without a breach of convention, might have stood at the door of Miss Judson's dressing room at the moment when the last rebellious strand was woven into its appointed place, at least half of Mr. Northrop's difficulties in bringing about an amicable settlement between the beneficiaries of Oliver Judson's will might have been avoided.

Miss Judson had handsome arms, dimpled elbows, and rounded wrists. They looked very white against the dark, glossy mass of her hair. Leontine stood at one side, her hands full of pins, making pretty suggestions while she watched. This was a part of the toilet at which she rendered only passive assistance. Miss Judson disliked the touch of alien fingers. The last hair-pin used, the combs and barette placed, Leontine brought a large silver mirror, which she held behind her mistress for a general inspection. Then Miss Judson rose.

"I shall wear the dress which arrived this morn-

ing," she said. "You may go now, Leontine. I will ring."

Natalie drew her kimono more closely about her shoulders, glanced at the clock, and sank into a chair by the fire. She picked up a note lying opened on the table at her side.

"My Dear Miss Judson:

"Mr. Northrop has told me that you have expressed a willingness to see me. May I give myself the honor of calling this afternoon at five? I should not bother you, if I were not sure that this is the only way we can solve the difficulties your uncle has made for you.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Brooke Garriott."

It was a civil note—very much the kind any other man of her acquaintance might have written under similar circumstances. The handwriting was vigorous, neither unformed nor clerkly, with an individuality expressive of character and opinions. The paper bore the heading of a well-known hotel. She had examined it carefully in a minute search for thumb-marks. There were none. Mr. Northrop was schooling his pupil well—the note itself was possibly written at the lawyer's dictation. It angered her that she could discover nothing to criticize.

It was after five o'clock. Natalie had planned to delay the completion of her leisurely toilet until her visitor was announced, but at a quarter past five she rang for her maid, and finished dressing.

"It is adorable," said Leontine, patting at an imaginary wrinkle under the sleeve of the new frock. "I should be willing to lose *all* my relatives, if I could look as well in mourning as mademoiselle."

Natalie swung around before the cheval glass, her immediate troubles lost in her delight in the success of Madame Vernet's last creation.

"It does hang well," she commented generously. "Why can't she always do that?"

When the card of Mr. Garriott was brought up, she glanced at it, and tossed it on the table.

"Tell him I will be down in a moment," she said.

But instead of going at once, she dismissed her maid, took up a book, and began to read. She had often done that when Winthrop Townsend or her little marquis called. It was one of her theories that a girl should never be prompt when she had an engagement with a man. The one downstairs was different from others of her set, and she had a sense of stooping unworthily to conquer where her pride suggested the carelessness of matter-of-fact. Yet how was one to remain unperturbed in the face of the destiny which hung around the personality of this objectionable young ruffian who wrote polite notes with all the air of one to the manor born?

At a quarter of six Miss Judson closed her book impatiently and rose. She must have it over at once. She found her visitor standing in an embrasure of the window, looking out into the street, his back to the drawing-room, unaware of her entrance. Her face was set in grave and haughty lines, and the fact that

he was unconscious of them disconcerted her. She was also under the necessity of speaking first.

"Mr. Garriott."

He turned at once, took a step or two forward, and then paused.

"Miss Judson is out?" he asked.

"I am Miss Judson."

"You—Natalie—Judson!"

She felt the flush at her cheeks, and drew herself up as she felt the directness of his glance.

"I am Miss Judson," she repeated quietly. The glimpse she had of his eyes made her think he was laughing.

"I beg your pardon," he began. "I——" he paused. "Of course it doesn't matter—only your Uncle Oliver gave me the idea that you were another sort of girl——"

Miss Judson smiled frigidly. "Won't you sit down," she said. Though magnificently indifferent, her eyes appraised him with a glance which neglected nothing from his light-brown hair to the shape of his boots. (These, she was relieved to discover, did *not* turn up at the toes.) In that brief moment she learned that he was broad and strong-looking, that his clothes were like the clothes of other men she knew, and that he was neither stout, moist, nor, at the present moment, "grimy." There was an upward twist at the corners of his mouth, which threatened at any moment to grow into a smile. When at last he did laugh, the sound, she was forced to admit, was not unpleasant.

"Of course I ought to have known," he went on,

"that Uncle Oliver would create a false impression. He always did. He told me you were—er—small and rather——"

Miss Judson's chin, if anything, took a higher angle as she looked through her visitor and out of the window.

"I fail to see," she said, with icy distinctness, "how any impressions my uncle may have chosen to create can have a bearing——"

Mr. Garriott's back stiffened for a moment, but his eyes quizzically examined her face as though with a new interest.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that Mr. Northrop put you in this position. He said Mr. Judson wanted me to see you and talk the matter over as soon as possible. There isn't much to talk over. I'm only trying to carry out the wish of a dead man. I hope you won't take it seriously, that's all."

"There's hardly a danger of that," she replied coolly, though she realized that this was just what she had been doing. Her gaze fell before his own and sought the pattern in the Turkey rug.

"I can't see," she continued in a stifled tone, "why Uncle Oliver should have played such a cruel joke—one that makes me a laughing-stock among my friends—and yours."

He was conscious of a modulation in her tone.

"That was Uncle Oliver's way," he returned. "It was a game we always played—and I think we both knew it was a game—but this taking it beyond the grave seems like carrying a joke too far. I don't mind. It's rather a pleasant joke to me."

She shrugged a shoulder, and threw a scornful look at him, but he was not easily dismayed.

"I came here to tell you I will do anything I can to make your position easier; that is, to save you from marrying me." He laughed. "I'm still the boy you used to hate. I haven't changed much. But you needn't be frightened. I'm not the marrying kind. I'm going West to-morrow—but before I go, I'll tell Mr. Northrop I refuse."

Miss Judson looked up quickly, a little shock of surprise in her eyes. While she had been so carefully choosing the words for a *coup-de-grace*, he had delivered it himself. Another man—a man like Winthrop Townsend—might have thought it in better taste to let such a decision rest with herself. But there was humor in the situation, which disarmed her for a moment, and she could not resist saying:

"You refuse to marry me, then?"

"Oh, I—I wouldn't put it that way," he replied pleasantly. "It's pretty clear nothing else is possible."

"Unless, perhaps, you gave *me* the opportunity of refusing *you*."

He bowed politely. The irony of her humor did not inspire friendliness. And his continued civility met her thrusts with a weapon as sensitive as her own. She was surprised at the keenness of his perceptions, which belied a certain abruptness of manner, and a curious drawl which she recognized as peculiar to the people of Western Pennsylvania. But she chose another course, which would not spare him.

"Mr. Northrop has done his duty, but I'm sorry

you've been put to the inconvenience of this visit, since it can only result in misunderstanding. You've done me the kindness to speak plainly. May I do the same? I have no intention of marrying. When I do, I prefer to choose my husband myself. I know you'll agree that it takes other things besides money to make marriage possible. I don't mean sentiment. I might get along without that. But I could never marry a man who wasn't accustomed to the things I'm accustomed to, who doesn't know the people I know—who wasn't in my—er——"

"Er—in your set," said Mr. Garriott suddenly.

"I would not have said it that way, but since you understand——"

She had not scrupled to veil the insult. There was but one reply. He took up his hat and rose.

"If it will make it easier," he said quietly, "use my name as you please; that is, to say that I've proposed to you and been refused. I'll write Mr. Northrop to that effect. Good afternoon."

He bowed and turned to the door. She noted that his eyes no longer smiled. His brow was smooth, but his lips were compressed. As he reached the door, she halted him.

"Wait a moment, please——" she stood wavering, holding the back of a chair and looking out of the window, while he waited for her to go on.

"I was hoping," she continued, in a low tone, "that you will not think me worse than I am. It has been harder for me than I thought."

She accepted the rebuke of his silence, but finished.

"I don't want to be hard. I think I almost wish we *were* friends. Of course, you must see—it's impossible —absolutely impossible!"

"Oh, I do," he returned. "A girl doesn't want a fellow thrown at her head. But the fellow can't be blamed for not liking the rebound. The only thing left is to carom back as cheerfully as possible. I'd like you to remember, though——"

There was a commotion in the hallway outside, where the butler stood at the street door, and the sound of a feminine voice.

"Oh, you needn't bother, Bradley. She'll see me."

And Mrs. Kempton entered in the fluffiest of afternoon costumes, fresh from a round of teas.

"Natalie, darling, I just stopped in for a moment to tell you—oh, I beg pardon."

She halted as her amused glance took in the situation, the girl uncomfortable and distant, the man, hat in hand, hovering angrily near the doorway. Miss Judson's lips moved almost inaudibly as she murmured the conventional "Have you met Mr. Garriott—Mrs. Kempton?"

The intruder raised her lorgnon—as much a part of her afternoon costume as the crop of her riding-habit—and examined the other visitor. Her scrutiny over, she extended her hand and gave him her friendliest smile.

"How do you do," she said. "I'm awfully glad to meet you." And then mischievously to Miss Judson: "Bradley said you were engaged, Natalie dear, but I shall never believe it."

Miss Judson gasped as she caught the meaning of this unusual audacity.

"Abby!" she cried.

But Mrs. Kempton only laughed.

"It's only a matter of a preposition, dear. Many more serious matters hang by fine threads. Don't go yet, Mr. Garriott, please. I've been frightfully anxious to meet you. You know, we've been thinking you were a kind of Banshee. I'm so relieved that you have shiny boots, and not hoofs and a tail."

There was something refreshing in her saucy effrontery. But he didn't know what to do, for in the exact proportion that Mrs. Kempton's friendliness increased, Miss Judson's manner froze. At Mrs. Kempton's last absurdity, Natalie deliberately turned her back and walked toward the window.

"Mr. Garriott said, I think, that he was hurrying to an appointment."

Abby Kempton curiously eyed the intolerant back. "I hadn't meant to keep him, Natalie. I was only wondering whether Mr. Garriott wouldn't dine with us to-morrow—just you, Mr. Kempton and I," she explained. "Can you?"

"I'm going West," said Garriott slowly. "I can't tell you how sorry——"

"Then don't," she broke in promptly. "All my life I've been dying to hear about locomotives—they're like people, aren't they, each with its quirks and ailments?"

"You forget, Abby, dear," broke in the voice from the window, "that I'm not dining anywhere just now."

"The Kempton house isn't *anywhere.* You *were* coming, Natalie, you know," she finished shamelessly.

"I've changed my plans."

Mrs. Kempton snapped her lorgnon impatiently. "How stupid!" she said.

"Of course, Mr. Garriott's arrangements are in no way dependent on mine," Miss Judson added.

Garriott needed no further excuse for departure. He bowed vaguely in the direction of the window, then gave Mrs. Kempton his hand. "I'm glad to have met you—and much obliged for your kindness. Afraid I can't come. Good afternoon."

CHAPTER III

THE LADY IN THE LIMOUSINE

"Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love, but—why did you kick me downstairs?"

He had read the foolish lines somewhere, and they rang in Garriott's mind all the way down the avenue, in his angry walk to the hotel. When he had come out of Yale and gone back West for the practical work, O'Dowd, in the shops, had been the first to set him down; and later, Jamison, foreman of road engines, whose vocabulary had made his name a by-word the length of the Western Division, had shown him, in appropriate language, the small niche he was to fill in the world—at least that part of the world in which they both sweated and strove in the company's service. That was life—experience. It had given Garriott, in exact terms, the measure of his usefulness. But it was a year now since Jamison had been given a chance to swear, and Garriott knew that the work he had done was good. His promotion and the allowance for experimental work had proved it. So far as the profession was concerned, he had found himself.

But he could not remember that ever in his life he had been placed at such a disadvantage as in this brief interview with his snobbish cousin-in-law. Not

O'Dowd or even Jamison, rough as they were, had ever so diminished him. It was clear that in the eyes of Miss Judson, he was a creature of another world—of the world of those who worked to create, to build, and to serve the uses of sublimated beings like herself and those of her class. His own struggle to win his way on his own merits had made him intolerant of superficialities, a reflection of which he saw so plainly written in the face of the handsome Natalie.

She *was* handsome. He was compelled to acknowledge that. He admired good looks in women with the same impersonal eye with which he enjoyed a lovely landscape. Natalie Judson was a fine bit of scenery, of the Alpine rather than of the domestic variety, with the frigid isolation of a glacier, the lofty magnificence of a snow-capped mountain, which peered down from its clouds on all lesser things. The plainer women were not so alarming. He couldn't help smiling as he remembered old Oliver Judson's description of her. "You know, Brooke," he had once said, "she isn't the sort of a girl a fellow like you could ever like. She's a bit shrewish—a little shrimp, with eyes and skin the color of a faded cornstalk—a great disappointment, my boy, a great disappointment." Her beauty did not make Garriott any less angry at Oliver Judson for the deception. God knows *he* didn't want to marry her!

Now that the unpleasant outlines of the situation had developed, he was willing to admit that there had been a feeling, when he came from the West, that a miracle of some kind was about to be performed. He

had reached a point where he had learned everything in the way of practical work that the company had to offer at the station. He was big with plans of his own. There were the inventions—his multiple cylinder engine, and the new generator. With money, he could carry on the work and bring the generator to perfection in a few months. The engine was already a success. If he remained in the service of the railroad, the company must reap the benefit of all experimental work done in its employ. There had already been some preliminary meetings in Washington, with the patent attorneys of the company, and the patents for the improvements in signals would soon be granted. They were now in practical operation on a part of the division. If he had so far succeeded for the company, with the company's money, what might he not accomplish for himself with money of his own? He did not shrink from the task of facing the future alone and unaided. But he wasn't fool enough to refuse a helping hand if it were offered him. Oliver Judson had once told him that some day there would be money for him to use as he pleased. But he had neglected to mention the conditions which were to accompany the bequest. Mr. Judson had never volunteered material assistance since the day Garriott refused to go into the wool business. Even if he had offered it then, Garriott would have refused.

Now things were different. Garriott was confident enough of himself and of his work, to believe that the Garriott engine had a more important mission than that of the Eastern Home for Aged Business Men.

Until his inventions had passed the period of experiments he had never thought about money. But now he could see how much he was to need it, and how much of it he was to need—not for the comfortable things it could provide the body, for he had a healthy scorn of luxury; he wanted it to prove to his fellows what he had been almost six years proving to himself.

It would have been a beautiful thing if the miracle could have been performed. It was time he was thinking about marrying somebody, and the idea of the shrimp with the cornstalk coloring had appealed to his imagination. The thought of her had suggested the things of which he was unafraid—good-fellowship, homeliness, and the singing of a tea-kettle. But the real Natalie Judson—no, he did not want to marry Natalie; he would as soon have thought of making love to the Falls of Niagara. A fellow who lived close to the ground could not afford to harbor a scornful deity among his modest household gods.

The next morning, his suit-case packed, his hotel bill paid, Brooke Garriott went downtown to Mr. Northrop's office. The streets were gay with shoppers. Handsomely tailored women descended from brougham and limousine, with the heightened color of expectation, and entered the doors of milliner and dressmaker in the morning round. Rare furniture and plate gleamed temptingly from velvety backgrounds of soft-hued rugs; paintings, handsome marbles, gilt mirrors, rare plants, jewelry—on every side the evidence of increasing extravagances of metropolitan life. Amid these surroundings Garriott felt more than ever aloof. Beyond

them he saw the brown pall of smoke, heard the roar of the furnaces, the clatter of machinery in his little world up in the mountains. And yet—he looked around him with a new interest—there was a majesty in a wealth which could command these things. His own comforts, of course could never depend upon them, but he could see how Miss Judson——

Angry at his thought, he crossed the avenue and approached the building where Mr. Northrop had his law offices. As he reached the sidewalk of the cross street a motor with chauffeur and footman drew up at the curb. The footman descended, opened the door of the limousine, and a woman in mourning stepped out. The path of the feminine figure and Garriott's converged upon the marble doorway, but it was not until they reached the entrance together that he saw that the woman was Natalie Judson. Her start of surprise did not escape him, and as he took off his hat, she inclined her head slightly in recognition, while he paused to allow her to pass in before him. Garriott replaced his hat with the abruptness with which one turns off the water of a cold showerbath. A light feminine laugh made him turn toward the automobile, from the door of which Mrs. Kempton's face was smiling at him. He hesitated. If Miss Judson were calling on Mr. Northrop it was clear that both convention and inclination required that he go elsewhere. He was in no humor to cool his heels in Northrop's anteroom, conscious that the girl in the adjoining office was scientifically engaged upon a catalogue of his deficiencies. He glanced at the lady in the vehicle;

then went over to her, resistless against the appeal of her humor.

"You timed your visits nicely," she said. "I hope you'll forgive me for stopping you—if it was prearranged."

"I'm glad I didn't go in," he laughed. "My ears are tingling now."

"I wanted very much to see you," she interrupted. "Did you know I sent a note to your hotel on the way down? They said you had left town."

"I have. Technically, I'm on my way West. As soon as I see Mr. Northrop——"

"You mustn't go there yet. I've something so important to say to you. Won't you get in for a moment?"

She made a place for him beside her, and as he paused again, she broke in gayly. "Oh, you needn't worry. This isn't the Judson equipage. It's mine. If you won't consent to accept *her* hospitality——" And, when he was seated, to the man: "Tell Walker to drive up Madison Avenue and to the Park. You don't mind being kidnapped for a while, do you?"

"But Miss Judson——"

"I was to do some shopping and come back for her."

"I'm very glad to be kidnapped, then," said Garriott, settling back among the cushions. "I think I like it."

She smiled approvingly.

"I hope you won't think I'm meddling. I want to try to make you change your plans. Natalie has treated you abominably. I'm really ashamed of her. That was what I wanted to talk to you about"

"I'm afraid it can't do much good."

"Or much harm. I'm the only one who risks anything. And I'm willing to take a rebuff for her sake."

"Oh!"

"She's very much disturbed. It was all so brutal."

"It wasn't my fault," he suggested. "Was it? I came East with the best intentions in the world, full of fine feelings, like the fellow in the book—prepared to kill the monster and rescue the lady from the rock. Instead of which, I find the lady taking refuge among her chains and mistaking *me* for the monster. It's pretty rough, I can tell you."

Mrs. Kempton didn't laugh.

"It would be funny—if it weren't so serious."

"Serious? Hardly," he sneered.

"Not for you. You're a man with a way to make for yourself. But it is for her—desperately."

Garriott made no comment, but clasped his hands on his knee, looked down at them with a frown, and listened.

"Natalie has been taught every extravagance, like the rest of us. She has no conception of the value of money. Prodigality was in the air she breathed. Whatever his custom in his business office, it was old Judson's pride at home that he denied her nothing. Some millionaires buy ivories, others books or gems. Oliver Judson spent everything on Natalie. She was his hobby. He worshipped her."

Garriott nodded. "I know—I know," he murmured.

"Oliver Judson disliked music," she went on, "but he got her a box at the Metropolitan, and even sat

through 'The Ring' because she asked him to. He was deathly afraid of horses, but he bought 'Hilarious' for her to ride—he had six *blues* and the pair, the best of their class in one of the best shows we've had in years. He gave her automobiles, pearls, and *carte-blanche* at the most expensive dressmaker's shop in town. Natalie never asks the price of anything. When she sees something she wants she goes and gets it. Fine bringing up, isn't it, for a manicure or a typewriter girl?"

She paused to watch her effect.

Garriott straightened up and searched her face.

"You can't mean that she'll be—as poor as that?"

"That's precisely what I do mean."

"Then she got nothing from her father's estate?"

"Nothing. There wasn't much of his interest left in the firm. What there was didn't last long—in New York."

"I had no idea," said Garriott slowly, "that things were so bad as that. I'm sorry. Do you think she knows what such poverty means?"

"No, I don't think she does—not yet. But she will—perhaps when it's too late."

"You mean—if I shouldn't—if she—shouldn't——" he floundered helplessly. "I don't see what I can do, Mrs. Kempton. I've got to remember that you're Natalie Judson's friend, before you're mine. I'm sorry for her. I'd like to help her if I could. I'm told that under certain conditions in the will, if I die within two years she could prove her interest in Mr.

Judson's fortune. I'm sorry it can't be managed, but I think you'll agree that I've hardly found anything in her manner to make me willing to shoot myself."

"I don't think she expects that of you."

They looked at each other and laughed.

"Oh, it isn't so bad as that," the girl resumed. "Of course, you're not the only man in the world. There are at least three who would give everything they possess to marry her. Winthrop Townsend is the richest and most ornamental. She's used to having him around—like a piece of Sèvres or a Persian hanging. He's blond and makes a good background. Then, of course, there is her little nobleman, De Chambord, but he may take flight now; and I suppose she might marry Winthrop at a last extremity. Réné de Land—he's dangerous—indifferent to all women, and so, attractive to all. She likes him, and doesn't take the trouble to conceal it. But he's not rich, in anything but looks, and that wouldn't keep them going. But she isn't in love with him. At least, I don't think so——" she broke off. "Of course, one doesn't have to be much in love to marry, nowadays, but Natalie is a curious creature, so different from most of us," she mused. "Even *I* can't understand her."

They had reached the Park, and the engine hummed contentedly as it glided out along the drive. Garriott experienced a grateful well-being in the quietness and power of the perfectly-ordered equipage. This was, indeed, another world from the one in which he lived. It was like his Sunday-morning bed—continued inter-

minably. It seemed impossible that people could do this sort of thing all the time. Some moments passed before he spoke. When he did, his voice was sober.

"Mrs. Kempton, I'll be frank. I'm not Miss Judson's kind. My life has gone in a different direction. This is very pleasant. You've only got to live at your ease for a while, to be convinced that you never were intended for anything else. It gets into the blood like a drug. Oh, I'm not going to preach. You wouldn't listen if I did. I don't want you to think I wouldn't like money. I wish I had a lot of it. I need it. I've some work that will take money to carry on. I'd make a good many personal sacrifices to get it. I don't think my conscience would trouble me much, either. Oliver Judson owed me nothing, of course; but he had no right to place me—to place *us*—in this position. I don't like being made ridiculous. You may imagine what my friends in the West are saying. Of course, I don't care much, only it hasn't made me feel any kinder to Uncle Oliver. And if there was any way of getting around the will, I wouldn't have any scruples about it."

"Isn't there some way?" urged Mrs. Kempton.

"I'm afraid not."

Mrs. Kempton thought for a moment, then spoke abruptly.

"Marriage perhaps, and then—divorce?"

Divorce! Garriott hadn't thought of that. Abby Kempton suggested it in the casual way, in which she might have offered him a cup of tea. But there was a poison in the thought which lingered in his

mind. It was a way out. Such a marriage would be no more preposterous than that piece of buffoonery Mr. Northrop was pleased to call the will.

"Suppose," ventured Garriott, "I should be willing to do it—what can you promise for her?"

Mrs. Kempton shrugged her pretty shoulders. "Nothing, unfortunately. But then, I have hopes. Are you really serious? I never seem to know when you are in earnest."

"I am," said Garriott. "They say fortune favors the fool. That's nature's compensation for the feeble-minded. I'll marry her to-morrow, if she'll have me."

"You think she won't agree. Will you let me see what I can do? If you'll dine with us to-night, I'll promise to have her there. Will you?"

"Yes. If I die for it."

"No. Live for it. That will be *my* reward."

Garriott found that Mrs. Kempton's eyes were hazel He had thought they were brown.

CHAPTER IV

THE GODDESS FROM THE MACHINE

DE CHAMBORD, who didn't understand Mrs. Kempton, had once said that her household was more of a manège than a ménage. The house was filled from top to bottom with trophies won by the Kempton stables. Cups, large and small, gleamed from shelf and mantel, and in the cupboards were enough blue, red, and yellow rosettes to decorate the year's winners at the Garden. There were collections of bits, spurs, and impedimenta of harness from every part of the world. The sporting prints on the walls of the library and dining room were in better taste than the paintings in the drawing room and hallway, which Kempton père had bought during the early days of the "Hudson River School." The dogs were everywhere, under furniture and on it—two spaniels, a French bull, and a Russian greyhound. To the little marquis, who did not care for dogs, the afternoon call at tea-time had many of the characteristics of the hippodrome. To love Mrs. Kempton, he discovered, one must love and be loved by Mrs. Kempton's dogs.

The furniture, like the staunch brown-stone mansion in which it was housed, was built for service, and, if one didn't mind dog hairs on one's trousers, it was

easier to be comfortable there than in any house in New York. Smoking was permitted everywhere, and one had only to turn at one's elbow to discover the materials for its enjoyment. Tommy McCall called it "The House of the Gilded Ash-tray." Jack Kempton liked a house full, and there were few weeks in the season which did not find his spare rooms occupied. It pleased him to have the house called Liberty Hall. It was not unusual for him to wander into the midst of a formal dinner party at his own board, soiled and travel-stained, arrayed in dust-coat and goggles. Abby Kempton didn't mind. Like other New York women, she preferred to go her own way, and realized that incuriosity was a small price to pay for her own immunity.

A superficial critic would not have called them unhappy, or even uncongenial, in the modern sense. Kempton admired his wife extravagantly. They were good pals, he boasted. Her judgment in horseflesh was infallible. She rode straight to the hounds, beat him shamelessly at tennis, and drove his roadster as well as he himself could. A trifle dull, the quickness of her wit put him at a loss, which she was not slow to use to her own advantage. But, as Mrs. Kempton had told Miss Judson, she was really "awf'ly fond of him." What he most wondered at, perhaps, was her success in getting whatever she wanted. She had a way of achieving the impossible. And it was Miss Natalie Judson who, at the end of a trying morning with her friend, at last tossed her hands almost with an air of fatalism as she said:

"Oh, well, Abby, of course, you'll have your own

way. I consent. I've only let you talk so that I could weigh your arguments with my own. Mr. Northrop half convinced me. I've been very rude to Mr. Garriott. I was wrong. I'm sorry now."

Mrs. Kempton was wise enough to conceal her triumph until she got home, when she sat at her desk and wrote a brief note to Brooke Garriott.

"I have had a serious morning with Natalie—and am exhausted with the effort, but she's coming to-night, so do not fail. We dine at eight, but come at seven. I want to talk to you."

The note lay on Garriott's dressing-table before him as he struggled with his white cravat. But as he went up the avenue in a hansom, he found himself in some doubt as to the wisdom of his decision. After all, Mrs. Kempton was scarcely more than a stranger, and he had a definite impression that he was delivering himself into the hands of an enemy.

The cordiality of her reception put him again at his ease. He found her enthroned on a saffron-colored divan, from which, after a noisy interlude, the dogs were banished. Garriott noted that the tints of her drawing-room were planned to harmonize with her type of beauty. But her ruddy color seemed to belong to the open air, and removed the impression he had previously formed, that all New York women of society were exotics. It was when she smiled that she was most handsome.

"Match-making is a little out of my line, Mr. Gar-

riott. I'd rather break a colt, I think. She's going to be polite, of course—frigidly so."

"I can stand anything. I'm going to offer my other cheek, Mrs. Kempton. Do you think I'd better propose between soup and fish, or put it off until the roast?"

"I'm not going to give you a chance. That's why I asked you to come in early. You're to flirt with me. Kempton won't mind. He's used to *that*. Besides, I told him I expected you to."

"That I——!" Garriott paused.

"Of course. Don't you like the idea?"

Mrs. Kempton drew away, and examined him from under half-closed lids. Mr. Garriott realized that his education was proceeding rapidly.

"Yes, I'm delighted. But I'd rather you flirted with me because you wanted to," he protested. "Suppose I forgot it was only make-believe?"

"Perhaps I'm secretly hoping you might."

"With your husband secretly hoping I won't?"

"Jack! Oh, Jack is beautifully trained. To my husband anything I do is an act of providence. He would no more think of interfering with my plans than he would interfere with the coming of winter or the approach of spring. He's a heavenly husband!"

"But I don't understand——"

"I didn't expect you to understand. You're only a man. You must let me manage your affair or I'll give it up. Natalie isn't stupid, either. She may see through it all. That would be fatal. So please devote yourself to me. All is fair in love and war."

Garriott shrugged his shoulders in token of complete surrender. She now leaned a little forward, so that she could better observe him. He wasn't certain whether she was smiling at, or with, him.

"Why did you consent to come here?" she suddenly asked.

Garriott took up the Japanese ash-tray beside him, and examined it deliberately, before he replied.

"Isn't it enough to say that I wanted to see you again?"

This time she tossed her head back and laughed with genuine enjoyment.

"That is polite, Mr. Garriott. But you don't deceive anybody—not even yourself. I know why you came. Natalie hurt your pride. I think you'd be willing to starve the rest of your life, if you could make her consent to marry you."

"I'm not different from other men. A chance is offered me to get everything a man could wish for," he said coolly. "Money, a house in town, another in the country, horses, motors, a famous beauty at my table——"

"Everything, in fact," she put in, "but the two things a man of your type requires."

His brows inquired.

"A wife—and a home."

"I can be no worse off than I am now. I have neither."

At a signal from its mistress, the French bulldog leaped into her lap. She pinched its ears in her

fingers, and held its pert, inquisitive face close to her own.

"It's lots of fun, isn't it, Toto? How would you like to be in love with a little dog-princess—that didn't have any heart. What would you do? Marry her whether she wanted you or not?"

His mistress blew in Toto's nose and he sniffed and shook his head.

"You see," she laughed. "Toto thinks it's all very silly."

"Toto has nothing to wish for," commented Garriott. "He's biased. So are you; for the same reason."

"I've lots to wish for—a complexion like Natalie's, for instance," she sighed. "Natalie was made by hand, and I with a trowel—I think——"

"In a garden," broke in Garriott, "where there were flowers, and air, and sunshine—that's where you were made."

Mrs. Kempton looked up.

"That's very sweet of you, but——" There was a gleam of mischief in her eye. "You mustn't flirt with me yet. You're wasting our ammunition. If you begin so briskly there'll be nothing left for Natalie.",

As the butler went to the street door, in answer to the bell, Mrs. Kempton dropped Toto to the floor, and turned to Garriott. "We haven't long to wait. The curtain will now rise on act two," she whispered. "Enter Miss Natalie Judson, in a black frock, which shows to advantage the dazzling whiteness of her skin."

There was no resisting her mood. Mr. Garriott

was still smiling as Miss Judson came into the room. He detected a slight contraction of her eyes as he got up from the divan beside his hostess and bowed. But she greeted him cordially.

"I hope I'm not late, Abby, dear," said the girl. "Winthrop *would* stay for tea, and it seems to take Leontine *hours* to find things."

Under the glow of the lamp, near which Miss Judson sat, Garriott could see how handsomely her features were put together: the arched eyebrows, slightly turned up at the inner corners; the nose, narrow, cleanly cut, and slightly aquiline; the mouth, a scarlet bow. It disappointed him that he discovered so little to criticize, and he cavilled at her beauty, because it had no faults. It had the perfection of a cloudless summer sunset, the flawless surface of a highland pool without a cloud to give it a finer character. What was it that she needed? A soul? As she talked to their hostess, he examined her at his ease, with a look so frankly critical that it verged on brutality. But she was unaware of his scrutiny; or, if she felt his gaze, gave no sign of it.

Full of apologies for his tardiness, Mr. Kempton at last appeared. He was tall, florid, leisurely, and bald, but Garriott remembered him as soon as he came in the room—John Kempton, the dullest scholar and best oar that had ever been in New Haven. The recognition was mutual.

"Why didn't you tell me, Abby!" he exclaimed. "You said Mr. Garriott. How should I know you

meant the immortal Brooke! Awf'ly glad, old man."

Garriott returned his cordial hand clasp.

"He was full back my senior year," explained Mr. Kempton. "Taken out of his Freshman team when we'd been scored on by every small college in the East, and all hope for the season was gone. Garriott made both touchdowns against Harvard and Princeton—you don't remember, Abby, of course. You were in Paris, then."

Mrs. Kempton looked on in a mingling of pleasure and dismay. She was aware that her protégé was losing nothing by her athletic husband's hero-worship, but saw in their college reminiscences an obstacle to the success of her plan of campaign for the evening, which she proposed to be a masterly retreat.

"Come, Jack," she interrupted. "Dinner is announced. You can fight your battles over again later."

After dinner, as they rose from the table, Mrs. Kempton's hand took a firmer control of the situation.

"I'm going to show you my orchids, Mr. Garriott. You may smoke. I'm going to. You don't mind, do you?"

And leaving Mr. Kempton and Natalie lingering over their coffee, she led the way to the conservatory.

"Well," asked Garriott, when they were alone, "do you think she's as much in love with me as yesterday?"

"She conceals it admirably."

"Not better than I do," he maintained. "No one could tell from my manner that I'm about to ask her to marry me."

"Or from hers, that she is about to accept you."

"Accept me!"

"Yes," she averred.

"Impossible! Why, she wouldn't speak to me, or even listen when I talked."

"And yet she heard everything you said—saw everything you did."

"She didn't look at me."

"And yet she watched you as a cat does a mouse. She has learned all she wants to know. Secretly, I think she was afraid you'd tuck your napkin into your collar, eat your oysters with your salad fork, or cut into your *timbale* of fish with your knife. Oh, don't be dismayed, Mr. Garriott. These are the things that would mean a great deal to Natalie. Other men might do them if they liked, and be thought careless—or original—but in you, they could only be the result of ill-breeding. No one understands Natalie as I do—I doubt if she understands herself," she mused. "I think what she most wants is to keep her independence. If she can preserve that by marrying you, I think she'll do it."

Garriott's condition of mind by this time was one of complete aphasia. Mrs. Kempton was dealing in subtleties so confidently, and with so practiced a hand that her deductions bewildered him.

"She will marry to be independent?" he asked mechanically.

"Of course. If she marries Winnie Townsend, she will be under the obvious necessity of becoming his wife. With you, the question resolves itself into a

simple matter of business. Half of this money belongs to her—half to you. She need ask you no favors—nor can you require any of her. She sees it now. If you had eaten with your knife, the thing would have been impossible. That danger removed, it only remains for you to 'pop the question'."

Humor struggled with incredulity, until Mrs. Kempton presented the facts. They had not seemed half so brutal until they were expressed in words. Then self-respect came vaulting to Garriott's rescue. He did not reply at once. The spirit of romance ceased to beckon, and the glow of his enterprise faded with the ash of his cigarette. His brow lowered, and he gazed gloomily out into the garden, above which the glow of a city at play illumined the wintry sky. The perfume of flowers was in the air, and a faint air of an open window, stirred among the quivering fronds, making quaint arabesques in silhouette against the Japanese lamps, which glowed in the obscurity. The pretty woman leaned back in her wicker chair beside him, her dark eyes lazily challenging him to combat in their merry war. But Garriott was no longer merry. He sat deep in his chair, his eyes under tangled brows, scowling moodily at vacancy. There was a sound from the distant drawing room within—of fingers running lightly over the piano, then of a feminine voice singing.

Garriott did not know the song. The key was low, and the voice came to them with the even, full-bodied notes of a 'cello, played by a loving hand. There was no one there to sing but Natalie. Abby Kempton's eyes were closed, a spell had suddenly fallen over them both.

Garriott sat immovable, fearing that the singer might guess he was listening, and leave the piano. But it seemed that she had forgotten them. That song finished, she sang another. It was as though Natalie herself had come behind his chair and had lain her soft fingers soothingly across his eyes.

CHAPTER V

THE MAKER OF OPPORTUNITIES

THE music trembled into silence. Garriott had not spoken, and the intuition of his hostess told her to remain silent, also. If music was "love in search of a word," Natalie had spoken it. Amid the babel of his thoughts it came to Garriott in a language he could understand, and he made no effort to deny its appeal. The listeners in the conservatory did not applaud the song. Any sound would have jarred discordantly among its last echoes. Mrs. Kempton read in the calm brows of her guest all that he thought he was concealing, as he sat wishing—in vain—that the singer might go to the piano again. At last, he stirred uneasily in his chair, and spoke in a low voice.

"You are still her agent?" he asked.

"Why do you ask? Have you changed your mind again?"

"I said I was sure I was making a mistake. I still think so. But I'm going to make it just the same, if the Maker of Opportunities will create the place and the moment."

He leaned forward in his chair, as though to rise, but Mrs. Kempton laid a hand on his arm.

"Not so fast. You mustn't rush your jumps like that. If I'm to advise you, I'm not going to have my plans spoiled by stupid jockeying. Jack will be bringing her out here in a moment. You see, the skilfull Maker of Opportunities waits for opportunity to make itself."

There was a sound of voices in the dining room. "You see," she added triumphantly, "I was right. Draw your chair closer to mine. There. I've something to say to you." Her voice had sunk to a whisper. "If you turn your head as they come in, I'll never forgive you."

Mr. Kempton came breezily in, but Natalie paused on the threshold.

"Natalie's been singing. I don't believe you've heard a note," said Kempton innocently.

Garriott rose, and Mrs. Kempton got up with an excuse and went into the dining room, from the door of which her husband caught her beckoning glance, a by-play which escaped the other occupants of the conservatory. But when Kempton followed, there was an awkward silence. The hand that guided their destinies removed, the man and girl sat stiffly in their chairs, like actors in a scene, in which one or the other has missed his cue. Both were conscious of their hostess's premeditation, and both were aware of what was expected of them. No word came. Natalie broke the tension with a nervous laugh.

"How silly!" she said.

"I'll try not to be any more disagreeable than necessary," said Garriott, and noted the almost imper-

ceptible toss of the chin, and the shade of annoyance that passed over her face.

"Is it necessary to be disagreeable at all?" she asked.

"I haven't any hope that what I say will be pleasant."

"Then why say it? Can't we leave things as they are?"

He shook his head slowly, and studied the pattern in the grass rug.

"I'm afraid not. Last week you and I might have met on an equal footing. Your uncle's death has made the difference. To-day you and I are merely two legal facts—somewhat at variance—which the law must reconcile."

Natalie made no reply, but he saw nothing in her expression to discourage him.

"I *must* be frank with you, Miss Judson. Perhaps," he went on quickly, "you know something of the relations between your Uncle Oliver and me."

She nodded.

"Why shouldn't he have let me know of his illness?" he went on. "I knew nothing of his death until I saw it in the papers."

"I suggested sending for you," she put in, "but he wouldn't permit it. He was cremated. There were no funeral services. Mr. Northrop, at his request, wrote you not to come, didn't he?"

"Yes, and I thought it very strange. Afterwards it made me angry. I was glad I hadn't come."

He could remember many things to be grateful for. Like Natalie, he was living for a moment in the past. Under the hand he had raised to his forehead he

studied her fine profile, as she looked beyond him, out into the garden. Helplessness he read in her expression and perplexity, but greater than these was the pride of her bearing as she struggled with the odds of fortune, which made her dependence on him seem all the more appealing. He had it in his power to make her happiness or to mar it. In the meanwhile, for a brief time she would be his wife. His heart leaped madly. As he looked at her it seemed for the moment as though her pride were only pitiful, her discourtesy the pettishness of a spoiled child.

"You cared for Mr. Judson?" he asked at last.

She did not reply immediately. She seemed to realize that he was purposely leading her into by-paths of sentiment, which afforded him shadowed glimpses of secret impulses.

"He was my father's brother, a kinsman—and my benefactor," she added.

"And yet," said Garriott quietly, "he would have condemned you to a distasteful marriage—would have taken from you the right every woman has, to marry the man she loves."

"I could still do so," she said half scornfully.

"But you would be poor."

"Yes, I would be poor. And I do not like poverty."

Garriott hesitated a moment.

"Yesterday, I thought you were hard to understand. But I understand now. I am an intruder. I belong to another world. Your friends and mine are run in different moulds. Their habits are different. They cannot think alike, nor can we. But that is no reason

why we should be intolerant of each other. My friends need yours. Without your friends our work must stop. Without my friends your friends would starve. I came here against my will. Perhaps, I can't help you—but I am willing to try."

He paused, to be sure that she fully understood him. The toe of her slipper was tapping rapidly upon the rug, but her face betrayed no sign of discomposure.

"Yesterday," he went on, "I suggested that you tell Mr. Northrop that I had asked you to marry me, but that you had refused. Did you tell him?"

"What was the use, since he already knew my views?"

"I was hoping you hadn't committed yourself to anything. Mr. Northrop knows my views, too, and yet I am less certain of myself now than yesterday."

"You mean——"

"What I had been about to propose was," he said with cool brevity, "that you should marry me at once—and divorce me at your leisure."

To this point, Mrs. Kempton's marionettes had performed their parts with ready response to her manipulation. But now another element entered—the personal one. Garriott had "rushed the jump." Miss Judson rebelled at the insensibility of his tone. It shocked her. And yet she had that very morning admitted that the slightest show of sentiment on Garriott's part would drive her to refusal of any plan he could offer. She got up and leaned against the window overlooking the garden.

"What you suggest isn't possible," she murmured coldly.

Garriott stood with a hand on the back of her chair, watching the warm lights from within and the gleams of the moonlight at gentle strife in the dusky shadows of her hair. She seemed to belong to the darkness, pallid, sombre, mysterious, chaste as Diana, and as elusive, her black dress and the filmy drapery on her shoulders like a part of the web of night lending to the illusion. And yet a tempest hovered near; he could see it in the flash of her eyes and in her clouded brow.

But he was undismayed.

"Of course," he went on pleasantly, "it would be necessary for us to live in the same house—for a time—otherwise, there might be legal troubles with the charitable institutions mentioned in the will. It would also be necessary for us to appear in public together—at intervals. So far as your own life or habits are concerned, I wouldn't want to change, or even modify them, in the slightest degree——"

"Thanks," she interrupted dryly.

"I could arrange to lunch and dine near my shop. If you could spare me a cup of coffee and an egg in the morning, and an extra latchkey, and a tiny room, somewhere out in a wing, or under the eaves, I promise that you will never know when I come in or when I go out; for convention's sake, a place for my hat on the hall table, a hook for an overcoat, and a place for a spare umbrella—you could hardly begrudge me that."

She turned her head indoors, and he saw that she was smiling—a cold, wintry smile, at best—but still a smile. This time his suggestions had been pitched in a

key which suited her better. There was no note of sentiment, or even of offensive impassibility—only tolerance in response to her inquietude. But in spite of these, she was aware of the dominant tone of insistence in the chord.

"You are a very masterful young man," she said. "Is that why you always have everything your own way?"

"Masterful!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Is a man masterful because he asks for a latchkey?"

There was no resisting his good nature. Natalie faced around, and for the first time appraised him with a glance which, while frankly critical, was not unfriendly.

"It is a desperate thing to do."

"We are creatures of destiny. There is no choice. It is either that or nothing—a marriage of convenience. You marry me for my money. I marry you for yours. It seems venturesome, but we are only doing as others are doing—as others will do. The lawyer-fellows who separate mismated pairs are as much a part of the social machinery as the magistrates or clergymen who tie them together. But you see, you and I would have the advantage of beginning without illusions. There can be no misunderstandings—no possible room even for argument. We will each be so well advised of the rights of the other, that there will be nothing left to disagree about. It isn't as if this sort of thing had never been tried before, you know."

"Aren't you really afraid? Suppose you fell in love——"

"I'll risk it."

"Suppose *I* fell in love——"

"When we are separated you can marry whom you like. You shall keep your friends. I shall keep mine, but I see no reason why they should ever meet—unless, of course——" he added politely, "you should wish it."

Natalie leaned against the casement and touched to her lips the petals of the delicate blossom beside her. She stood so for a long while, alternately sipping the sweetness of the flower and looking from half-closed eyes out into the night. Garriott watched her with a calmness which spoke well for his self-control, when all his perceptions were alive to the trembling balance of their fates. At last his expression changed, and when she looked up at him again, he saw that the puzzled wrinkle at her brows was gone. She sank into her chair with a sigh, and waved him into the one beside her.

"Come," she said, "let us sit down and talk it over."

CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO WHERE

THE farce was over. Both the "I wills" had been said, the rice thrown (its symbolism lost), and Mr. and Mrs. Garriott were ready to depart for the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry, en route for the Judson country place on Long Island. The wedding had been quiet. An elderly cousin of Natalie's had been summoned from Philadelphia, to give the bride away. Mrs. Kempton had been matron of honor, and Jack Kempton best man.

The facts had been kept out of the newspapers. But a girl of Miss Judson's wealth and social prominence, could hardly expect to take so important a step without attention. So, in spite of Mr. Northrop's efforts to keep the exact time and place of the wedding a secret, a crowd of reporters and photographers awaited them on the sidewalk. Even more than the words that had been spoken indoors, the presence of these people brought to Natalie a sense of the importance of the step she had taken. She felt that all her heart's secrets were to be worn threadbare by the tongue of gossip, and she shrank back angrily into the doorway.

"Can't you make them go?" she whispered to Garriott. "Can't you?"

Kempton understood, and, pushing his way down the steps, made so determined a front that, by the time the bride and groom were ready to descend, a path had been cleared, through which they were hurried to the protection of the quivering machine, which was awaiting to carry them off. The incident had disturbed Natalie; she hid herself in her corner of the limousine, staring moodily out of the window as the chauffeur skilfully spun his machine through the crowded streets toward their destination, and Garriott made no effort to distract her attention. Not until they reached the Long Island shore, and had come to the long stretch of country road, which led to their new home, did he venture to speak.

"You are very quiet," he said. "Are you sorry?"

"No." The rising inflection of her voice was almost flippant, and she continued to look out of the window, with the jaded manner of a person bored to the point of extinction. He noticed among other things, that in her hand, tightly clutched, she held the torn envelope of a note. He said nothing more, but read his mail. The situation seemed to foreshadow a most extraordinary honeymoon. She moved in her corner again, and as she did so, the envelope dropped to the floor. He bent forward and restored it to her. She took it quietly, and a shade of annoyance passed over her face. While Garriott could not fail to note her discomfiture, he refrained from comment or inquiry. After a while in silence, he ventured:

"I hope we'll be good friends."

Garriott had long realized that in point of friendli-

ness, the relations between them left much to be desired. In the six months, which had intervened since their first meeting, he had seen her seldom. The arrangement of all business matters had been left to Mr. Northrop, and while Garriott had called at the Judson house each time he was in the city, Natalie had managed to give his visits a character so formal that there was no room for a display on his part of anything but the most perfunctory marks of civility—a custom he had found it necessary to observe even more rigidly when they were alone, than when they were in the company of others. The spring approached, and every other person and thing in the world thawed but Natalie. While he did not pretend to understand her, he had been willing to let matters take their course. At first it had pleased him to imagine that her impractical view of life, her captiousness, her love of luxury, were the result of environment; and that softer attributes would be discovered to him in the course of their ripening acquaintance. So her reticence had not greatly discouraged him. He was like the purchaser of some rare volume, who is happy in the knowledge of possession, who keeps his treasure near him on his library table, where he can admire its sumptuous binding, its workmanship and beauty, saving for another delectable hour the mysteries within.

Her present attitude created the impression that he had made a mistake in judgment. The binding of his volume was no less sumptuous than when he had bargained for it, but its opening pages took something from his illusions.

The moment of his awakening was at hand. The fingers which held the note in Natalie's lap moved nervously again, and the girl turned moodily toward him. He could see her from the corner of his eye, but he continued to look out of the window.

"It is a dreadful thing—a sinful thing we have done."

"Sinful?" he asked.

"No good can come of it. It is all a lie—what I have sworn—a lie. I have never lied before. It frightens me. I do not love—I couldn't honor—I have no intention of obeying you. Is that clear?"

He regarded her calmly, though the unnecessary violence of her tone aroused in him an angry, belligerent spark, which he had some pains to keep from bursting into flame.

"Perfectly. I've never questioned it for a moment. But why speak of it at all? I'm not going to compel you. I should not have come with you to-day, unless it had been necessary to do so, in order to keep up appearances."

There was a precision in his utterance, like the swish of a steel blade as it came from its scabbard, and she looked around at him to find in his eyes a light like the cool glint of the blade unsheathed. She hesitated—and then looked away, for there was an expression she had never discovered there before.

"I'll not be unreasonable," he went on. "I'll stick to the letter of our agreement. I've no intention of intruding. You bear my name. I hope you'll find it worthy of respect, and, whatever our relations may

be in private, in the presence of others I shall ask—and shall expect—civility."

She would have had more ground for anger, had his rebuke been less just, and the cool insistence of his voice stung her to the quick. But the fact that she seemed to have underestimated him, made her less certain of herself.

"And if I do not choose to be civil, when you please?"

"Then it will be war," said Garriott grimly. His lips snapped together firmly, and under lowered brows he looked straight before him.

"I think you're making a mistake," he continued, in measured tones. "I've tried in every way to show you friendliness. You haven't met me in the same spirit. I didn't hope for any enthusiasm over the prospect of your marriage, but I did hope, every time I went West, that the next visit might reveal you in a more generous light. You'll pardon me, if I say that I think that, no matter how much you hated me, it would have been in better taste if you had hidden your feelings."

The sulky red lips were compressed into a hard line, and her eyes flashed rebelliously.

"I think—I'm sure I've never hated you—*until now.*"

So it was to be war. He took her challenge coolly, wondering at her lack of self-restraint, as he had often wondered at her impudent disdain.

"I'm sorry I misjudged you. Of course, as my wife, you have a right to hate me as much as you

like. I think, on the whole, I prefer to be hated than politely tolerated."

"I'm glad you've found me polite," she flung at him.

The situation was unpleasant, and even a little brutal. Garriott seemed to realize it first. He looked around at her as she huddled in her corner, sullen but determined—if anything, handsomer in her anger. It came to him then, that perhaps he had not sufficiently considered her.

"You know you can't get your divorce at once, and you must have my society at times, whether you like it or not; so you'd better try to make the best of it."

"It is impossible."

"You should have discovered that before."

"I couldn't. I didn't know——" She had straightened and was fingering again at the letter in her hand. But there was a different note in her voice.

"What was it you didn't know?"

"It doesn't concern you."

"I'm not sure of that. Perhaps I can guess."

"I wouldn't tell you if you did."

"You'll admit your marriage hastened the discovery?"

"I admit nothing."

"You won't deny——"

She was silent.

"Silence is confession. You won't deny that being married to me makes you wish you were married to someone else."

If he had suddenly performed some successful act

of ledgerdemain, he could not have surprised her more. She turned toward him with startled eyes, advised a second time of the accuracy of his impressions.

"It's true, isn't it?" he asked again.

She refused to reply, but he waited patiently, and at last her lips moved: "And what if I do?"

"Nothing. Only I'm sorry. It's a pity you couldn't have discovered it earlier."

Her reply was scarcely audible—suppressed, as though the words were hidden thoughts wrung from her against the will.

"Perhaps it's better I discovered it late."

And while he wondered at her meaning, she turned suddenly, with one of those swift changes of mood he so little understood, and thrust a crumpled envelope into his hand.

"Read it," she commanded. "It is your right."

He eyed it dubiously.

"It is from—from *him*?"

"Yes. From *him*."

But he would not take the letter.

"No," he said decisively. "You're very kind, but I prefer not."

"It is your right," she insisted.

"I know. I have other rights, but I won't claim them."

There was no reply for that. But as he took up an unfinished letter of his own, he could see that she was still looking at him, studying his expression as though there was something in his attitude which puzzled her. He bore the scrutiny with composure.

"Have you no curiosity to know who he is?"

"Possibly. But I don't see what good the knowledge can do me—or you. We understand each other little enough as it is. Why increase our opportunities for discord?"

"On the contrary——"

"I prefer not to hear," he said firmly.

"Why?"

"I should be under the necessity of denying him the house. I leave that unpleasant duty to you."

"You—would—deny——"

She stopped, white to the lips, her hands clutching at the cushioned seat. "Oh! is this the way you reward my generosity?" And then, through her set lips: "I shall have him—if I like."

He inclined his head soberly. "If you like," he repeated, "the responsibility will be yours, and so long as I don't know who he is, there will be no harm done. Are you so sure of yourself? It is a dangerous game. Perhaps you don't mind playing with fire."

With an effort she controlled herself.

"Do you know that your language is rather insulting? Perhaps you don't. Any friends I choose to invite to 'The Grange' must be welcome there—you understand? And when Réné comes, I shall expect—I shall hope——" She halted, and then stopped in dismay, for Garriott's figure had stiffened at the sound of the name. But he shrugged his shoulders and laughed unpleasantly.

"Réné De Land? So you had to tell me. I wish you hadn't."

But she put on a bold front.

"Are you threatening?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I still believe you have too much good sense to force the issue."

"I shall do as I please," she flaunted.

For the present she seemed to have won, for her husband turned his attention to the landscape. They had reached Habberton village, and, following roads familiar to his wife, but unknown to him, approached the neck of land beyond the harbor where Oliver Judson had built his summer home. A cool, salt breeze from the Sound swept into their faces, as they mounted the crest of a hill, and Garriott drew an involuntary breath of delight at the splendid panorama suddenly laid before him. The saffron tint of late afternoon colored all the hilltops, picked out the tiny sails in the bay, and painted from its fullest brush the stretches of sand along the farther shore, which edged the sapphire sea, a broidered setting fit for so rich a jewel. Beyond, between sea and sky, drawn in less decisive colors, hung the sails of ships, and seaward a tall steamer stained the turquoise sky. Garriott was new to the sights and smells of the sea, and he sniffed vigorously at the clean air, and almost forgot—his honeymoon. Natalie had other thoughts. The scene was familiar to her. "The Grange" was not far off, and she had often ridden here when the day was failing and she wanted to be alone with her thoughts. The scene changed quickly. They plunged down the hill again toward the tawny, velvet woods, into the cloisters of which they presently entered, the sun slanting fitfully

across their road, lighting their way with a cheerful glow, worthy of blither travelers.

Through the foliage Garriott caught a glimpse of lawn, greenhouses, and red brick towers.

"That is 'The Grange'," said Natalie quietly.

She leaned forward against the lintel of the door, listless and dispirited like a disconsolate child, her drooping figure giving no hint of the stateliness of her usual carriage. Here was another side of her he had never known, and it appealed to him even more than the voice of the singer. She was his. Had he not sworn to love and cherish? Her hand, ungloved, was beside him on the leather cushion. With an impulse he put his own over it.

"I am sorry," he whispered, "sorry for many things. I will try to make it easier for you."

She did not withdraw her hand, nor did she return his pressure. She seemed very tired. But her eyes softened. He could see that.

"I think perhaps, we both had better try."

"Thank you," he said simply. "It will not be so hard. The time will pass rapidly. It won't be any harder for you than it is for me. You are coming home. I am entering the house of——"

"Of illusion," she finished. "I am a strange girl, Mr.—Mr.——"

His laugh disconcerted her. It was so free, boyish and untrammeled, but it seemed to awake no discordant echoes.

"I'll believe you, unless you call me Brooke. It's more in keeping Miss—er—Judson."

She smiled. It was too absurd.

The pillars of a gateway flashed past, and the tires rolled over the gravel of a well-kept driveway. There was a vista of blue beyond a long reach of lawn, over which sheep were grazing, and a view of a long house of brick with a wing built in the English fashion, stables and garage among the trees at the back, a terraced garden, hedges of rambler—all his—and hers.

Servants met them at the door and carried in their hand-bags and wraps. The brief moment of their *rapprochment* had passed. The sight of the respectable, uninteresting face of the servile butler, effected the transformation.

"Mr. Garriott will have the rooms over the library, Bradley," she said, with a shade of her old insolence. "You got my message? Is Leontine here? Tell her to come up to my dressing room at once."

That was how Garriott came home.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOLTED DOOR

GARRIOTT followed the butler into the house, where he was met at the drawing-room door by another individual, as ancient and urbane as Bradley, who took the suit-case and showed the way up the fine oak staircase, to the rooms which were to be Garriott's. The magnificence rather startled him. He had understood from Mrs. Kempton that 'The Grange' was modern and commodious, but he was not prepared for the size of the house, and the evidences of taste and luxury in all its furnishings. It hardly seemed as though the city residence could have been occupied by the same person who had lived at "The Grange." The city house was a relic of the period of chamfered elegance, when protuberances and scrolls passed for ornament, and lofty ceilings made for the dignity lacking in other particulars of architecture. Its sombre draperies and walnut furniture belonged to a past, too young to be elegant, too old to be graceful. At "The Grange," where it would have been easy to make mistakes, a master-taste had dominated. Was it Natalie's? He had never been in a great country-house before, and the sense of space, the shadowed

stateliness of its large proportions, while they gave him a quiet pleasure, aroused also a feeling of deference, which contained some of the elements of awe. He could not understand why Oliver Judson had never told him about "The Grange.' Was that, too, a part of his surprise? And of course, Natalie had not bothered to tell him anything.

Still wondering, Garriott reached his rooms, a bedroom, bath, dressing room, and study. Here, too, were the same evidences of refinement. In the study, chairs, built for comfort as well as beauty, a broad, low, reading lamp, some shelves of books, the magazines on a table, some good ivories on the mantel, prints upon the dark gray walls, and a wide window-seat, looking over the terrace and harbor.

"Mr. Judson's rooms, sir," explained the man. "Miss Natalie—that is—Mrs. Garriott, sir, had them arranged for you."

He was fingering the straps of the new master's suit-case.

Garriott had a vision of this magnificent individual hauling out of its hiding-place, the kind of ragged shirt he had sometimes worn in the West, and with an involuntary gesture stopped him.

"What are you doing?"

The man straightened.

"Shall you not dress now, sir?"

Garriott laughed. He suddenly remembered that his linen was new.

"Oh, very well. What's your name?"

"Tibbott, sir. I drew Mr. Judson's bath and laid

out his dinner-clothes for fifteen years—his valet, sir—yours, too, I hope. Shall I draw it now, sir?"

The prospect appalled Garriott. He had lived in a fourth-class hotel in a Western town, where a dress coat was either an object of suspicion or of amusement. He had always had one, but in the little manufacturing city he had kept it in his trunk. He couldn't repress a smile, when he thought what Bill Jamison would say when he knew Brooke had a man to "lay out" his clothes and "draw" his bath. Tibbott eyed the new master impassively. Twenty years with Oliver Judson had taught him never to be surprised at anything. So he unpacked the valise, and then silently crossed the room and turned the spigots in the bath.

It was clear that unless he made a declaration of independence Tibbott would arrange a schedule as immutable as time. For the present he yielded to the inevitable, lit a cigarette, walked over to the window, and looked out over the lovely landscape. Straight before him, rolling gently to the blue harbor, lay a lawn, cut through the virgin woods and bordered on each side by a heavy hedge of rhododendron, just coming to bloom. A path wound through the trees at the left, and down near the boathouse he could make out the lines of several craft moored close to the jetty. When Tibbott came into the room again, Garriott questioned him.

"What boats are those, Tibbott?"

"Boats, sir? A sloop, a power boat, and some launches, I think. Mr. Judson was very partial to the water, sir."

Had Tibbott added, "for bathing as well as sailing," he could not have looked at his master with a more eloquent eye.

"And the little house to the right?" continued Garriott.

"That—yes, sir—that's the head gardener's cottage."

"H—m. Do you know how many servants there are?"

"More than twenty, I'm sure—thirty persons, perhaps, sir, with the coachman and chauffeur. Miss Natalie—that is, Mrs. Garriott, sir—she has always run the place generously. Though, as I sometimes says to the housekeeper——"

"That will do, Tibbott," broke in Garriott. "You may go. I'll ring. By the way, what rooms do all these doors lead to?"

"This, sir, to the guest chambers," indicating, "the one to the left, to the morning room. The one beside me, here, to the corridor to Mrs. Garriott's private suite." He put his hand on the knob and turned it, but the door would not open. "I did not know——"

Brooke flicked his cigarette out of the window.

"That will do, Tibbott," he said quietly.

"Thank you, sir. Is there anything else?"

"No!" roared Garriott. And the man, with another reproachful look in the direction of the bathroom, vanished into the hall.

Garriott dressed slowly, with many reflective pauses between the bath and the dressing table. It was, indeed, another world into which he had been transported.

He realized with dismay that the taste of luxury, while it gave his conscience a qualm, was most agreeable. He felt as though he were discovering some new and delightful vice. He could not make himself understand that all this was his own as long as he liked it, and that the "Taylor House" would not see him to-morrow, or the next day, or the next. No more would he sleep in his little room on the fourth floor, smoke his pipe in the tiny lobby, or eat his meals from the little bird bathtubs, amid the clattering dishes in the noisy dining room.

"The Grange" seemed like a dream, but there before him were his clothes, already "laid out," and there was Tibbott, who had "laid out" Mr. Judson's clothes for fifteen years. Fifteen years was a long time. There was something pleasantly tangible in the thought that this well-ordered house, or another like it, might shelter him as long as that. But he felt restless and ill at ease. It didn't seem fair to Jamison or even O'Dowd. He decided to go back to New York as soon as he could, and help get the new shop into working order. Of course, for the present his plans must be uncertain. Convention would hardly permit him to spend his honeymoon in overalls.

His toilet finished, he found himself sitting in the big Morris chair beside the fire-place, facing the door which led to his wife's apartments. The door was of white enamel, with a cut-glass knob, like the other doors of the study, but the mere fact that, like the forbidden door of Bluebeard, it was the one door which must not be opened, gave it a mystery and inter-

est like nothing he had ever before experienced. Once he fancied he heard a light laugh and the sound of hurrying footsteps. She was happy again. She had never laughed like that when she was with him. He tried to picture her in the dainty informality of her own rooms—the real Natalie stripped of the veneers of formality she wore for him alone. What were her rooms like? He was sure that there he should find the impress of the personality he guessed at, but so little knew—the color of the walls and drapery, the pictures and books she would choose, her photographs, her silver and jewelry, and all the other dainty knick-knacks—symbols of the life of the woman of her class. It was a wonderful door, the gate to Paradise, with the key thrown away.

Downstairs Leontine brought word that Mrs. Garriott had a headache and begged to be excused. He had expected that, and he was not at all surprised. So he dined alone, seated in Oliver Judson's arm-chair at the head of the table. Here he discovered that Bradley had an assistant, in blue and gold with a potato-bug waistcoat, who followed in the butler's steps, placing dishes and removing others in an endless round of unobtrusive activity. Four times only was the silence broken: when Bradley questioned "Sherry, sir?" followed at appropriate periods by "Burgundy?" "Champagne?" and "Port?" to all of which Garriott nodded gloomy acquiescence. He ordered coffee on the terrace, and went out to smoke, meditating gravely upon a certain scriptural passage referring to the respective merits of "herbs" and "stalled ox." But a long, very

dark and stout cigar soon contributed a share in the argument, and he lay back in a *chaise-longue* with a sleepy eye on the wistful moon, in a state of cheerful lethargy which defied the tooth of Time. In the gloom below him lay the tennis courts; at his left stretched a wing of the building he had not seen before, the guest chambers, evidently; at the edge of the woods was the squash-racquet house; and beyond in a field were some "jumps," where Natalie schooled her hunters. Garriott wondered hazily where the track and golf-links could be concealed. Down in the harbor he could hear the hum of motors, and saw lights skimming the water in the direction of the village. What chance was there here to fall on evil days? The balmy air came up from the Sound and stirred the lilac bushes to perfume. Lazily he watched the smoke of his cigar float upward in the moonlight until it drifted to a window among the vines. There he was drowsily aware of a face—at least, he thought he was—emerging from the shadows. So he sat up and looked around.

"Hello," said the face.

Brooke was sure he must have been dreaming. Was she really making an effort to be friendly? "Hello," he replied.

"Are you lonely?"

"Yes. How is your head?"

"Better, thank you. Isn't it heavenly out?"

"Great. Won't you come down?"

"I'm not——" a pause. "I was so tired; will you mind my looks?"

"I couldn't see you anyway."

This promised well. She vanished, while he wondered if she'd come, surprised and not a little pleased at her condescension. In a moment, shimmering in some soft material, she joined him.

"Did you have enough to eat?" she asked pleasantly.

"You're killing me with kindness," he said. "You know I'm not used to this sort of thing. I miss the taste of chicory in the coffee, and my black pipe is jealous of this cigar."

"Why don't you smoke it then?"

"I wouldn't dare."

"Why?"

"Tibbott wouldn't approve. You know I'm a little afraid of Tibbott."

She laughed, and, leaning against the stone balustrade, faced around to the sea, and it seemed as if they were almost friends, for that moment, at least.

"You like it here, don't you?"

"Better than anything else in the world. In New York I only exist. This is life—the only life. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, it's fine. Only you're giving me ruffles when all I need is a shirt."

"I like ruffles."

"So do I, when you wear them."

There was a shade of annoyance in the gesture with which she drew her draperies about her and changed the topic.

"You shall see the place by daylight. I'm very

proud of it. Uncle Oliver let me help with the plans." Then, suddenly: "Do you ride?"

"Yes."

"Jump?"

"No; but I can learn."

"Tennis?"

"Some."

"Play bridge?"

"No."

"Would you like to learn?"

"Yes. Will you teach me?"

"You won't win unless you play well."

"I'll win more if I don't play at all," he laughed.

"But you must play. Everybody does. There's nothing else to do on a rainy day but squash, and that's tiresome. Besides, what does it matter? If you lose, there's always more."

So this was her philosophy. The lamp of Aladdin was there to be polished, and it made no difference to her that the genii was dead.

"Mr. Northrop hasn't shown me any statement yet —of how much there is. Do you know?"

Her manner changed. She turned languidly. "I'm sure there's enough."

"But there won't be so much now, will there?"

"Perhaps not. I've never thought. There's a lot to be done here yet—and I want a yacht."

"I thought there was——"

"I mean a deep-sea boat," she broke in, "like the Van Sciver's. I hate railroads and ocean liners. Think how much money it would save."

She joined uncertainly in his laughter, and as he made no comment, demanded: "Don't you approve?"

"If Mr. Northrop does. I shouldn't let a little thing like a steam-yacht come between us."

"What has Mr. Northrop to do with it?" she asked petulantly. "He's only my agent—*our* agent. He must do what I—what we ask. He's an old man. One is only young a short while. I want to live every hour of it. Don't you?"

"I think so; but I can't—not the way you mean."

"What?"

"I must go back to work."

"Of course. But aren't you going to play, too?"

"Not just now," he said soberly. "I'm afraid I must go back soon."

"To the West?"

"For a few days. I've ordered my things for the shop, and I've got to help get things going."

"I wish you could stay for a while." She paused, and he searched her face swiftly for a meaning. She noted it; her lips curled, and she extinguished him with a look.

"I mean," she went on coldly, "for the sake of appearances. A few of my friends know the conditions leading to my marriage, others think it an affair of long standing. I'd like to keep up the subterfuge—until we are forgotten."

"But why keep up the subterfuge here? I'm unknown to most of your friends, and I'll hardly meet them in town."

"That's true," indifferently. "Perhaps I could ex-

plain your absence. Of course *I* understand, but *they* might not."

"Do *you* want me?"

"Decidedly not—not alone. We should never get on. With people around, we might make a pretense of friendliness. That's why I'm asking some people here next week."

"Oh!"

Was it some feminine instinct of self-preservation that had suddenly frozen her? Brooke hoped so. He sensed the change in the tones of her voice, in the cold decision of her manner. Perhaps it was the moon that had made the trouble—the charitable moon, which, in spite of her, made less garish the flaring discord of their relations.

Garriott, deceived for a moment by her impulse of friendliness, had been willing to see it less distinctly, and it provoked him to think that it had not been so with her, and angered him that he had laid himself open to the rebuff. They were as far apart as the poles. If Oliver Judson had deliberately chosen these two to test his theories, he had made no mistake in judgment. The moon went under a cloud for a moment, and Natalie was only a pale wraith before him, the ghost of the girl that might have been.

"We don't seem to get on," said Garriott with a laugh. "If I said that green was green, it would be sure to turn out some other color. I've heard of perfect strangers who, when they met, began instantly to fight. There's no reason why we should, if we learn to understand each other."

"Do you think we ever can?"

She was leaning on the balustrade, her soft draperies blowing against him; every line of her graceful and feminine, full of suggestion of the gentle possibilities of life with which he had so long been unfamiliar.

"I was wondering," she murmured softly, as though trying by a modulation of her voice to make what she said less unfriendly. "Of course, we can never be anything to each other; but I think we might be neighborly. I would rather have people think we were on terms of friendliness. It might seem strange to them if you went away at once."

"You can hardly expect to deceive others when you can't deceive yourself. Of course I'll stay, if you like, but the people in your set won't bother a great deal about us. They're not going to break our faded little butterfly on the wheel. What our relations are, is unimportant. I shall be the inevident husband. The main fact is that you're married—emancipated. Nobody can question you. It doesn't matter whether I go or stay."

"That, of course," she said coldly, "is perfectly true." She reached forward, picked a blossom, and, turning, put it in her hair. In another girl, it might have been an act of coquetry, but to Garriott it seemed as though she had snapped her fingers at him. In order that there might be no misconstruction of her meaning, she added: "I don't need a host, you know. Bradley knows where the liquors and cigars are kept." Then she turned and leaned over the balustrade again, her narrowed eyes looking into the night.

The insult may have been unconscious, but Garriott took it as a challenge, and his reply was advisedly brutal.

"Does he? I *might* be useful in the pantry. I once tended bar in the West. I'll back myself against Bradley any time. When is your house-party coming?"

She noticed the Pennsylvania drawl—the rising inflection of the question, with the sudden drop at the last word. It had never seemed so provincial as now. Garriott saw the shiver of disgust with which she turned away.

"Not until you *go*."

"Who is coming?"

She did not reply at once. She recognized his right to question her, but the thought that she must answer was repulsive.

"I—I've not decided," she said, her voice suppressed. "The Kemptons, of course, the Dudley De Witts, perhaps; Mrs. Wetherall, Miss Van Sciver, the Marquis de Chambord, Winthrop Townsend, Tommy McCall, and—and——" she hesitated.

"Réné De Land?" he finished.

She faced him furiously.

"Yes; Mr. De Land—if I choose! What right have you to forbid it?"

She was worth looking at; and, drawn to her full height, she was nearly as tall as he was—the light of her soul extinguished in the hot spark of rage. Her eyes glowed like coals, and in them he saw hatred unspeakable.

"I haven't forbidden it. I've only appealed to your

good taste. Legally you are bound to loyalty. Morally I suppose you may have as many lovers as you like."

"I shall ask Mr. De Land," she flashed.

"And I—what part was I to play? You fear the verdict of your friends—or was it something else you feared? Was I to be foil or refuge?"

She tossed her head, and went on breathlessly: "You play no part—you understand—now, or at any time. Your thought is insulting. One needs no refuge when one is with friends. The only enemy I have is the one in my own house. The only fear I have is the fear of him."

He made no effort to stem her tirade, but heard her to the end, sure that something of the blame was his, but more than ever resolute to discover which was the master will. Her bitter contempt of him stung more than her insults, but her defense of Réné De Land hurt more than either. She was wonderfully handsome in her defiance. Passion became her; her breast heaved convulsively, her hands were tightly clasped, and her eyes blazed with resentment. Had she been a man, he must have struck her. But his impulse to physical action was none the less strong. His hands trembled to touch her. She was close to him, and he had but to reach out his hand to take her. She was his. Houses, servants—all were his and hers. It was so ordered. If he did take her, he would only be doing that which all the world believed to be his right. What could she do? She was helpless. The hot blaze of her anger inflamed him, too. All gentler instincts were

overwhelmed in the glow of her antagonism, which had in it something of the untamed fury of the animal. This it was that spoke to him, the warm flush of her blood, which was hatred (but which might have been love); the rounded arms, lithe and strong to resist (or tender to embrace); the petulant, intolerant lips, which could not by bitter utterances disguise their true mission. He looked down, away from her, that he might not see her and be tempted, clenching his fists that his fingers might not reach forth and seize. Even then the feminine perfume came to him, some subtle sachet in the webby thing that was floating in the breeze, but mingled with it was the odor of her hair. Did she know her danger? He heard her voice still speaking, with the ring of defiance that had become familiar to him, but he did not hear what it said; he only knew that what she said was insulting. He tried to reason with himself, thinking deeply, wondering if there was any justification. He admired her courage; she must know that no woman under such conditions could speak to a man like that; when he looked up, she saw something in his face that made her start back, but it was too late. With one step, he was beside her, had taken her and held her body close to his, in arms that were stronger than hers. He kissed her on the brows, eyes, and lips that had so scorned him, again and again, warmly and brutally, rejoicing at the terror in her eyes, unmindful of her struggles, aware only of the sinuousness of her lithe, young body, the softness of her skin, the warmth of her blood. He felt her figure cease struggling and relax in his arms. It was terror

of his strength that had conquered her. He released her abruptly, and she shrank against the terrace away from him in affright, watching him towering before her, still threatening. She saw him turn and point toward the door.

"Go—go in the house," he muttered breathlessly, "or I'll not answer for you. Go at once, do you hear?"

And she fled.

CHAPTER VIII

A HOUSE PARTY

I'VE often wondered, Réné, dear," said Mrs. Kempton, "why I've never succumbed to your attractions. Are there already enough domestic wrecks strewn along your beach? Or don't you think me worth while? It's invidious discrimination. I'm not flattered."

Mr. De Land laughed.

"You might think I was some sort of amatory simoon," he sighed. "I've always loved you, Abby. Half an eye could have seen that. But you didn't care."

"I wonder why."

"I'm not your sort."

"And I'm not yours?"

"The fact is, you're such a good fellow, I want your friendship. You can help me if you like."

"Suppose I decline?"

"You couldn't."

"Explain then. But I warn you, unless she's single and poor, I'll have nothing to do with you."

"And if she's neither?"

"Oh, no, I'm not going to commit myself. I may like you, but I don't in the least approve of you, Réné. As a member of the 'Protective League for Young Married Women,' I protest."

He made a gesture of annoyance.

"Won't you be serious?"

"Well, you're in love with a married woman again. What are you going to do about it?"

He looked up quickly. "Yes, she's married," he said doggedly, "but marriage hasn't anything to do with it —at least, *her* marriage hasn't. You know I've never given much importance to marriage."

"Yes, I know," she said soberly.

"The trouble is that you make a rite of a social convention. That's all it is. Marriage was only invented for sapient youth or fatuous age. I neither have nor am one or the other. And something within me has always rebelled against a pension on Western millions. I've called it conscience, for want of a better name. You may smile, if you like, but you'll admit I've always been true to my convictions. Perhaps I'd have married a poor girl if she hadn't been so easy to get. But I've always wanted the unattainable."

"And that is why you want Natalie?"

"Haven't I always wanted her?"

"I'm not so sure. Natalie single was a handsome but random female biped; married, she's quarry—legitimate game for men of your class. Be careful, Réné dear. All husbands are not as angelic as Jack."

They were driving over to Habberton in Mrs. Kempton's touring car (Jack Kempton with De Chambord in the roadster had already given them his dust), bound for Mrs. Garriott's house-party at "The Grange." Mr. De Land had come *post haste* from Washington on receipt of Natalie's note of invitation, dubiously leav-

ing the prospect of his foreign appointment to the mercies of his friend, Rawle, chief of the Diplomatic Bureau. No one but Natalie and De Land knew what had happened at their meeting the day before her marriage to Garriott, and Mrs. Kempton alone guessed at the exact nature of the sentimental relations between them.

As De Land made no reply, Mrs. Kempton cut in with a change of manner.

"Natalie was foolish to ask you to Habberton. I, for one, want to have a good time, and I don't intend to be a party to your confidences—and hers. If I listen to any one, it will be to Brooke Garriott."

"Garriott?"

"Yes. I'm interested in him—in them."

De Land puckered his lips, which emitted a thin whistle.

She turned on him.

"I don't mean it in that way—not in the least that way," she added quickly. "You don't understand me, and you can't understand a man like Garriott."

"I'm not sure that I want to. No woman brought up as Natalie was could love a man forced on her as Garriott was. We both know she hates him. Draw the veil of charity around him if you like, but it doesn't deceive anybody."

Mrs. Kempton's eyes were turned to the distant blue of the Sound.

"Think what you please," she said slowly, "of me, or of him, only—don't underestimate him."

"Oh, I'll readily promise you that," he laughed. But

he could see that there was little to be gained from Abby Kempton, and, accepting his rebuff gracefully, turned the talk in other channels.

At "The Grange" the clans were gathering. By the time Mrs. Kempton had arrived, the afternoon train had brought other guests. The shaded terrace was gay with summer costumes, the men in flannels, the women rejoicing for the first time in the lightness of voiles and embroidered linens, and in their emancipation from the thralldom of the city. A game of lawn-tennis was already in progress at the courts, between Jack Kempton and Tommy McCall, while Natalie, becomingly pale, poured tea and greeted the newcomers: Mrs. Wetherall, relict of Addison Grange, Gilbert Darrow, and DeCorcey Wetherall (now looking for number four), wearing an Irish lace gown and looking as though she had been melted into a cornucopia and hadn't all got in; Lydia Van Sciver, just arrived from a voyage around the world, tall, angular and bored; and the Dudley De Witts, the man a disciple of Metchnikoff, his wife, of Omar, the woman leading the way across the terrace, her very appearance a triumph for her philosophy, her husband's a defeat for his own—and him.

"So glad you could come, Nina dear," Natalie was saying. "The north rooms are yours. I hope Dudley will be comfortable. I've arranged for his *Kephir*. . . . Lydia, what a perfect duck of a frock! Paquin? Of *course*! Two lumps, you said? Thanks, Winthrop. . . . Yes, dear, Leontine will show you. Did you bring Jeanne? I'm so glad. Leontine *must* learn that new

way you have of putting on the bandeau. . . . Hello, Abby! . . . Réné, you must have loitered by the way. We were almost ready to give you up." . . . And so on, as she fused the social amalgam.

There were few inquiries for Mr. Garriott, and Natalie was grateful. Inwardly she still blazed with shame and resentment, though outwardly rejoicing in the presence of friends who could help her to forget. Winthrop Townsend hung gloomily in the background, but the Marquis and Miss Van Sciver were already on their way among the rhododendrons. Réné De Land, at an opportune moment, dropped into a vacant chair beside her.

"Tea, Réné?" she asked coolly.

"Please. Lemon—no sugar. Have you forgotten?"

"It's not so long——"

"It's a century. Did you get my note?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't you reply?"

"There was nothing to reply."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing I could write."

"You blessed child. I'm hungry to hear——"

"Sh—Réné. You mustn't—not here."

"Where, then?"

"I don't know."

"I *must* see you. After dinner?"

Natalie rose. "Don't be foolish. Of course I'll see you. You're going in to dinner with me."

"Do you expect me to be content with that?"

"For the present—yes."

His presence delighted her. It was the one thing Brooke Garriott had proscribed. Yet something held her back, and she left him there, his tea-cup suspended in mid-air, and fled to Abby Kempton, who, with Dudley De Witt, was watching the last set of the tennis match, which seemed an even thing in the betting. The sun had already thrown the long shadow of the house across the lawn. In a moment the game was over, and Kempton, perspiring copiously, came seeking Natalie.

"Where's Garriott? Where's Brooke?" he asked, blundering with full-blooded vigor. "He took me into camp in the inter-class at college, but I've something to bet——"

"Sh—h, Jack," said his wife. "Haven't you learned better than to ask wives about absent husbands?"

"Mr. Garriott—Brooke—had to go to town, Jack," said Natalie calmly. "Won't Tommy do?"

"Oh, of course. But I was hoping"—his face brightened—"he'll be back for the week-end, though, won't he?"

But Natalie had turned away. "Come, children," she said cheerfully; "it's time to dress."

Abby Kempton took her arm, and together they strolled toward the house. Upstairs Natalie's manner changed. Mrs. Kempton, after a quick survey of the room and her hostess, which missed nothing, dropped among the pillows in the window-seat, and asked:

"Well?"

Natalie's reply was almost sullen.

"There's nothing to say," she said thickly. "We agree to disagree."

"Isn't he coming back?"

"I don't know—or care."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing."

She turned abruptly, and said no more.

To Abby Kempton she seemed fidgety and unsettled, like a child brought to the point of a confession which would not come forth. And when she spoke she approached the subject obliquely.

"If you only knew how glad I am that you came. I would have gone mad alone."

"Nonsense, dear. One is less apt to go mad alone," she said significantly, "than when in company." And then suddenly: "Why did you ask René?"

"I wanted him."

"Do you think it was wise?"

She didn't reply.

"I thought you had better sense, Natalie dear. There's only one excuse for an old lover."

Natalie's brows languidly inquired.

"A recreant husband."

"Or a masterful one," she put in scornfully. "Mine apparently is both. We can't get along. There's no use trying."

She aroused herself angrily.

"We're perfectly impossible together. Besides——"

Her eyes flashed darkly, but instead of finishing as she had intended, she put her head among the pillows on the divan, from which Mrs. Kempton heard in muffled tones, "Oh, how I hate him!"

"His presence delighted her. It was the one thing Brooke Garriott had proscribed."

Abby touched her lightly on the shoulders.

"Don't, dear. If you cry, you'll make your eyes red."

But the face Natalie raised to hers, while it flamed, bore no trace of tears.

"Cry!" she said. "Don't worry, I'll not cry. Tears come from the heart. Thank God, he cannot touch me there."

There were only three years of difference in their ages, and yet, to Abby, Natalie seemed in the stress of passion to have become a child again. Her poise was gone, and through the thin veneer she wore for others, Abby saw the grain of the unseasoned wood. It dismayed her, too, when she thought how much of a part she had had in the making of the match, and yet a year or two of self-control was not a high price to pay for all that Brooke Garriott had brought her.

"Well, I suppose you think *I'm* responsible."

"Oh, no, dear. I needn't have married him. It's not your fault. I'm sorry to bother you. My regret is that I'm still conscious of ideals."

"Réné?"

She wouldn't reply.

"Why didn't you marry Réné, then?"

Still no reply.

"And now you and Réné are going to hold a *post-mortem* over the remains of your dead romance. Very pretty—also dangerous, and a little dishonorable. Does Brooke know?"

Natalie sat bolt upright now among her cushions,

frowning with growing resentment at her pretty tormentor, who had risen and was standing at the cheval glass, taking the pins out of her hat.

"I can't see, Abby dear," she said acidly sweetly, "how it can possibly make any difference to you. In fact, I should have thought you would be pleased to know that my attentions were otherwise engaged."

Mrs. Kempton wheeled quickly.

"Natalie! How could you?" The sparks were flying between them.

"It doesn't seem possible that you can be Brooke Garriott's friend—and mine, too," Natalie went on. "Fortunately, I'm not jealous—not of him—and it's lucky Jack isn't. But I don't see that my relations with Réné need weigh heavily on your conscience. Réné and I are old friends, and at least we understand each other."

Abby, who had been listening curiously, now shrugged her shoulders.

"You deluded child. As you please; in other words, I am *de trop*. I accept the hint. I won't bother you again. But I don't want to be misunderstood. I am Brooke Garriott's friend, in spite of trying to be yours. I thought you were wiser. I hope you won't regret your point of view. When chance throws men of his type in our way we don't know what to do with them. They grate on our pretty affectations, sound our shallow pretensions, spoil our finest effects, which men like Réné live to create. You may think what you like of me, Natalie dear, but when your husband is at a loss for advice, I'll offer it—if he asks me."

"Of course, Abby darling. By all means begin by asking him to come home. With Tommy McCall and Nina, Réné and I, Winthrop and Alida, the Marquis and Lydia, we all seem to be paired but you. You'd like him to be here, wouldn't you?"

"Of course. That leaves only Jack and Dudley DeWitt. Jack would think I was losing my senses if I showed a preference for him. And Dudley—you couldn't expect me to flirt with an alimentary canal."

But Natalie refused to smile.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shall do nothing to prevent his coming, but I will not write him."

Abby shrugged and turned away to the window, where Natalie presently discovered her shaking in silent merriment at something outside. A station wagon was approaching the house, a very rickety station wagon from the village, drawn by a forlorn-looking horse which jogged in protesting dignity to the terrace steps. The man inside paid the driver, got down, and, suit-case in hand, made briskly for the doorway.

"I fancy there'll be no need to write," said Mrs. Kempton cheerfully. "You must have told him I was coming, for here he is."

Her hostess had rushed to the window in time to get a glimpse of her husband's coat-tails as he disappeared in the shadow of the portal. "What is it, Natalie dear? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

Mrs. Garriott sank to the window-seat, while Mrs. Kempton moved toward the door. "Au revoir, dear. I've kept you too long. We'll be late for dinner." Her hand was on the knob, but at Natalie's cry she turned.

"Abby! you mustn't go—not yet—please!" she appealed.

Mrs. Kempton was enjoying the situation. Dismay, disappointment, and surprise, all were pictured in Natalie's expression. It would have taken but a small flight of the imagination to see fear there, also. Abby turned, without relinquishing the door-knob.

"Yes," she said pertly.

"Come in again—and close the door. You—you must help me."

"I help you? I thought——"

"Forgive me, darling. I am very miserable. I'm afraid—afraid there may be trouble."

"Trouble!"

"Yes, about Réné. Mr. Garriott didn't want him asked."

"He knew——"

"I—I would have told him—but he guessed."

"At your unfortunate passion?"

"No—no. I—I've loved Réné always," said Natalie with dignity. Mrs. Kempton raised her slim shoulders, and smiled quizzically.

"And what is it you want me to do? Throw myself to the lion so that he may not devour your pretty martyr?" Mrs. Garriott seized her friend's hand and drew her back into the room, her voice appealing almost wistfully.

"Won't you, Abby? You can save a disagreeable situation if you will. I don't understand Brooke Garriott. He's rough sometimes—impulsive—and quite capable of making a scene. He dislikes Réné. There

isn't much love lost between them. Can't you see him?"

"What? Now?"

"You must."

"I'll be late for dinner."

"I'll wait dinner until nine, if necessary. Please?"

"Oh, anything to oblige. Then you *do* want my advice?"

"Yes—yes."

Mrs. Kempton sighed. "I seem to spend most of my life bridging gaps between the husbands and wives of my unfortunate friends. I'm tired of being a go-between—a matrimonial buffer. You forget that I'm human, Natalie—with human feelings, illusions—like you. Who would step into the breach for me? I warn you, you're making a mistake. Send for him to come here, and speak to him yourself."

"I can't. No, no! That's impossible."

Mrs. Kempton hesitated. At last she said: "I don't see what assurance I can have of being successful. Brooke Garriott is a man who makes up his mind for himself. He's proud, too. I fancy he has no humor to have you make a fool of him in his own house. But I'll see him and do what I can——"

"Oh, you darling!"

Mrs. Kempton held her off at arms-length. "On this condition: That you try again to be decent to him. I don't know what he has done—or what you have done. But I'm going to take his part. He's too good-looking. It goes against the grain to see a man who is really worth while wandering unattached in the social

wilderness. I sha'n't permit it to happen, and I warn you now—if you don't claim him soon, *I will.* Do you understand?"

Natalie had not always been sure that she understood Abby Kempton. Her last speech as she went out of the door mystified her even more than the manner in which it was uttered. Her look was quizzical, but her words rang with a meaning of which Natalie could not be unconscious. But she tossed her head and rang for her maid. "I don't care what she does," she muttered, "or what he does—if he leaves me alone," then added reflectively: "It *would* be shabby of *her*, though."

CHAPTER IX

IN THE MOONLIGHT

GARRIOTT was much impressed by the magnificence of his own hospitality, though he was hardly surprised to learn that the force of servants at "The Grange" was equal to any situation with which they might be confronted. Faithful to his intention to remedy past errors and reach a peaceful agreement with his wife, he had accepted the conditions presented by Mrs. Kempton with grace, and throughout the long dinner bore himself in a manner worthy of praise. He had only seen his wife in the drawing room before dinner, in the presence of the others. She had greeted him with a smile and a friendly nod, carefully calculated to disarm criticism. It had not pleased him to see her go in on the arm of Réné De Land, but Mrs. Kempton had appeared at the psychological moment with a quip and a smile, and had borne him along laughingly in their wake. Natalie now sat at the opposite end of the table, flanked by De Land and Winthrop Townsend, but screened from her husband's vision by the massive centerpiece of roses. Garriott recognized in Mrs. Kempton's remark, "In our set husbands and wives are not required to have more than a nodding or speaking acquaintance," a statement of fact, rather than the casual epigram of the pretty cynic.

But Mrs. Kempton wouldn't let time hang heavily on his hands, or hers. At his left sat Mrs. De Witt and Tommy McCall, so that it was from the upper end of the table that most of the laughter came. Mrs. Kempton had never shown at a greater advantage, and made no effort to conceal her graceful appropriation of her host, who offered no defense against the gentle marauder. On the contrary, he found his captor witty, original, and very kind, qualities he had not yet discovered in the woman who bore his name. That his wife was clever, he did not doubt, for she had that reputation among the people whose society she frequented; that she did not court his good opinion, was equally clear. He had been offered no evidence as to her capacity for kindness, unless the promiscuous complacency of her hospitality might be said to approach its requirements. But it pleased him a great deal to think that Abby Kempton's warm impulses, the springs of her amiability, seemed bountiful enough to flow readily to those she most cared for and still leave enough for him. Her beauty, if less stately than Natalie's, seemed more robust and colorful, her manner and speech freer from the affectations of her class. There had never been a moment with Mrs. Kempton when Garriott had not been entirely at his ease. She was one of those rare, chameleon-like creatures, who attract, absorb, and then give forth the handsomest colors of those with whom they are brought in contact. And so, in spite of the well-cut profile of Réné De Land, which was continually bent toward his wife, Garriott was pleasantly aware that he easily dominated the group about him,

an important figure in the gay little world into which chance had set him. But he was not sorry when at last Natalie rose and led the way to the terrace, where the coffee was served, and where the men could follow and smoke if they liked.

In the new apportionment Garriott soon formed the center of a group of women bent on making his acquaintance, Mrs. De Witt accepting him without hesitation, Mrs. Wetherall questioning exuberantly, Miss Van Sciver listening at one side, appraising him rather insolently from half-closed eyes. Rumors had reached her abroad of the strange kind of man Natalie had married, and she was not yet prepared to accept him into the charmed circle of her acquaintance, which she had formed with such scrupulous care.

Garriott answered Mrs. Wetherall mechanically, for over her shoulder he could see his wife and De Land leaning over the parapet of the terrace. But as the party scattered—some to the bridge game, others to the garden—Jack Kempton came proposing billiards, and Garriott followed indoors, where Mrs. De Witt and Mr. McCall awaited them.

Left to their own devices, Réné De Land and Mrs. Garriott found a bench in the shadow of the terrace overlooking the tennis courts. They had sat here before, on such a night as this, when the moon had beckoned and the elfin sea-mists were playing among the trees. Here De Land had once told Natalie that he loved her, and she had laughed at him, because she knew that he had told other women that. But to-night there was a difference; to the man, because only prohibited

things were interesting; to the woman, because she was the thing prohibited. An element of interest was added in the presence of Garriott, who was as yet the unknown quantity in the equation. For, in spite of the contempt in which Natalie held her husband, she was secretly frightened at the disagreeable possibilities for mischief which he presented. Réné De Land was conscious only of the woman beside him. It was always so with him. She was the only woman in the world, and he lost no time in telling her so. She could not resent it. She believed it herself.

"I'm simply mad about you, Natalie dear," he whispered. "I can't stand seeing you unhappy. Why couldn't you have believed me? Why didn't you save yourself while you had the chance? I would have slaved for you. We could have managed somehow."

"On five thousand a year?" she laughed. "You dear, foolish boy—that doesn't buy my clothes. We would have lived like pigs. Don't try to deceive yourself. You would have been as unhappy as I. You must have trouble getting along as it is."

"You couldn't have been more unhappy than you are. Do you think I'm blind? I've watched you. You hate the very air he breathes."

"That is true. I hate the very air he breathes," she repeated deliberately. "But then, that does not prevent his breathing it."

"But there is a way to prevent *your* breathing it."

"Flight? From 'The Grange'? No. It's *mine*," she said passionately. "This is *my* home. It was built for

me. I helped plan it. I love every acre of it. Do you think I would leave all this to him?"

Her hostility to Garriott engrossed her, and however favorable an omen that seemed to himself, this was no moment to press a claim. Réné's friends had always told him that with women he had a sense of the fourth dimension. He used it now, and so was silent.

"He is within his rights. I can't expect him to stay away. What is it that people see in him?" she went on, as though to herself. "Abby is mad about him, and Jack, of course, *he* can't see it. It's so unlike Abby. She always hated prosy, conventional people."

"You're not jealous," laughed De Land.

Her lip curled. "Of *them*, yes. They were *my* friends before he was my husband. I can understand Jack. I think I understand Abby. Oh——" she turned on her companion abruptly, "haven't you anything else to talk to me about?"

Her petulance was one of her chief charms to De Land. He took her hand and pressed it softly to his lips. "You poor child. I've not been talking," he said patiently. "You know any trouble of yours is mine, too. I wish you'd only given me the right to prove it to you. As it is, you've tied me hand and foot. The end of the world may come before you get your freedom. I can't wait long. Every night I have walked the floor. It has maddened me to think of you bearing this man's name—enjoying all that you enjoy on his sufferance. The night you were married, after I had fallen asleep, I thought I heard your voice. You were in his arms——"

"That is true," she interrupted calmly. "I *was* in his arms. But I did not cry out. He kissed me——"

She brushed her hand across her lips. "He kissed me again and again. Do you hear?"

De Land started up. "The cad!" he stammered.

"We quarreled. He had frightened me. I was too weak to struggle. He kissed me—and let me go——"

"And then?"

"I went. I have not seen him since until to-night. Can you wonder that the sight of him brings it all back?"

"God!" he broke in. "You can't stay here."

She gave a dry laugh and shrugged her shoulders. "And where shall I go?"

"There is but one place for you to go."

"No."

"Yes. Yes. You must come abroad. I'm sailing soon. You must leave him. There's nothing else. I've always loved you, Natalie. Nothing can ever change that. I have the prior right. Do you think I can respect a claim like Garriott's—or recognize a marriage made by a dying lunatic? You belong to me. I won't wait. I take you now. . . ."

He had his arms around her now, and she listened, trembling.

"Is there any dishonor in a love like mine—anything more base and brutish than a life with this other man you let them call your husband? Don't you know that he will worm his way into the hearts of your friends—he has done so already—that after a while you will forget there is such a thing in life as the kind of love

I've offered you, that you will live, as other friends of yours live, with the men they marry for money, as you are marrying for money, content with the symbols of happiness without happiness itself, your finer perceptions dulled by rough usage, your only ideals your memories of the things that might have been? What does he offer that will save you from that?"

She aroused herself, as though awaking from a sleep, and drew away from him, disengaging his arms from around her. Was there a missing premise in his argument, or was there a break in the current?

"That's very pretty, Réné," she said, with a slow smile, "but *you*—what can *you* offer?"

"I offer my—myself," he said blankly. "Everything you now lack. Companionship, understanding—of course, I haven't much else," and then, apologetically: "My income, as you know, is not large. In Europe it will be larger. I think we could get along."

"Have you considered?"

"I've considered nothing—nothing but the fact that at all hazard I must have you. It maddens me to think of the misfortune you've plunged us into. I pleaded with you, warned you, but you would not listen. You had not thought of this new danger with him. You said he was a stupid prig, wrapped in himself and his grimy pursuits, a person you could manage as you pleased. It seems you've brought a bull into your pretty china shop. He hasn't begun any too daintily. I miss my guess if he doesn't soon have the run of the place."

"And me?"

"Yes, you, too—unless——"

"Never!"

"What can you do?"

"I don't know." Her jaw closed firmly. "But he shall not master me. I will win in the end. For the present we must come to an understanding."

"Impossible. He has broken faith with you. He will do so again. Are you willing to risk it? It is dangerous. The only thing you can do is to leave him, Natalie. Take a companion and go abroad. Come to Paris. I can be near you there. We can wait quietly until he divorces you, and then——"

"He may not divorce me."

"If he wouldn't divorce you, you could divorce him. There are ways of managing that. Won't you trust yourself to me? Won't you, dear? I'll be very good to you. I'll make you so happy that you'll forget that there was ever anything in your life but what I will bring to it."

Against her will his voice soothed her like a caress, and she lay back very near him, almost ready to believe that his was the only solution of her problem. There was witchery in the night. The moonbeams were playing at hide-and-seek among the lilac blooms, softly dappling the shadows beneath the oaks, encrusting with jewels the gossamer webs which had already been spread along the lawn in token of fair weather. In the shadows, mystery; in the lights, illusion; and in the air, the scent of a myriad of hidden blossoms. Only herself and the man beside her were real. She was conscious that his hand clasped hers, and his lips

murmured at her ear, gently, persuasively, with a note which awoke to life again an echo of the sound every woman must hear, the note which Natalie had always so resolutely stilled. She was almost ready to believe, too, that this was the true romance, that his was the only voice that could fill the chord to harmony, his the only presence that could so delight her. She was content just to sit and listen. How well he understood women! How well he made love! Was there another man in all the world who could meet her moods like Réné? His voice seemed very far off now, the touch of his hand even intangible. She was dreaming of the things that might have been.

Emboldened by her sensibility, he drew nearer, and, while she still dreamed, he put his arms around her and pressed his face close to her own. But as his lips brushed her cheek, she sprang away and held him at arms length.

"No, Réné," she said gently; "not now."

He could not understand. "Why, what have I done?"

"Nothing. You must be content. Do you think I could have *his* kisses on my lips, and yours, too."

"But mine——"

"Are not for me, Réné, so long as I belong to *him*. Don't you understand?" she pleaded. "Don't you feel what I feel? Isn't there something in the memory of his touch still warm on my lips"—she brushed them impetuously with her arm—"that robs them of their freshness? Shouldn't they be the symbol of what you have been trying to express—that it would be my right

to hear you express if it weren't for the shadow between us?"

"I did not put it there," he said coldly.

She sighed. "No, nor did I. But it was always there."

"What do you mean?"

"I am wiser than you," she replied, smiling kindly. "Mr. Garriott isn't the only obstacle between us. I think I understand what the comforts of life mean to us both—to you, as well as me. You offer me half of what is yours. You didn't know, when you offered it, that it would be really all we would have to live on." He made a movement of protest.

"Let's be honest, Réné," she went on. "If I should go abroad with you, I'd have to go without money. You didn't know. I didn't tell you. What was the use? For two years Brooke Garriott and I are to have a joint account. Neither of us can draw on that account without the other's signature. It was my uncle's device to keep us together. Devilish, wasn't it? Also, effective. It's easy enough to see that Mr. Garriott could hardly join hands with me in a plan to bring dishonor on his own name, or pay the expenses of his wife's elopement."

Natalie's *sang froid* had cooled De Land's ardor, and he sat straight on the bench, gazing gloomily into the darkness. Her latest information was astounding. He was greatly perturbed, and took no pains to conceal it. Nervously he lit a cigarette, and deeply inhaled before he spoke, and when he did there was a note of inquietude in his question.

"Does Mr. Garriott know about me—about *us?*"

"Yes," she said quietly. "He guessed."

"And he didn't object to my coming here?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, yes, he objected. But I said I would ask you just the same. That was why we quarreled."

"But to-night—he's entirely civil—I don't understand——"

She sighed wearily. "Oh, it's all arranged. Abby took pity on me. It seems she has some influence with him."

De Land nodded. "Yes, I fancied that." He got up and walked up and down before her. "So your mind is made up?" he said coldly.

She reached forward and took his hand in hers. "Don't be cross, Réné, dear. We must be patient. I need all my friends now. It can be no harder for you than it is for me. You should see why it is that I cannot give myself to you—why I want the love I shall some day give you to be as sweet as though I had given it to you before——"

"Before Garriott kissed you," he said brutally.

She hid her face. "Don't—don't; it's not worthy of you."

"I'm jealous of him, I tell you," he went on sullenly, "jealous of his right to be near you, jealous of his kisses, his authority, his money, which brings you things I cannot bring."

She smiled. "Would you wish to kiss a woman, as he did, when every atom of her was rebelling against your touch? Would you care to be near a girl who

hated the sound of your voice and shrank when she heard your footfall?"

"Yes," he said, "if you were the woman. I would do as he is doing. I would take what was mine." He fell on his knees at her feet, holding her tightly in his arms before him, so that, try as she might, she could not shrink away.

"You *are* mine—not his. I'll take what belongs to me. Your lips——"

"No, no!"

"He took them when they belonged to me."

"They're not yours until I give them."

"They're mine if I take them."

"No more than they were his, when he took them."

"Am I no more to you than he is?"

"Don't, Réné."

"Do you think I'm a child, to be put off with promises? You've said you loved me. Prove it now."

"That would not prove it."

"It's the proof I'll have."

"Let me go, Réné. Let me go."

There was a brief struggle, but she escaped his grasp, and in a moment she had slipped past him and was fleeing up the terrace steps and away.

"Natalie!" he called. "Natalie!"

But she wouldn't answer.

CHAPTER X

TWO—AND AN EXTRA

HE found her in the cardroom later, where she had cut in at Mrs. Wetherall's bridge game, rosier than usual, laughing a little nervously when De Land appeared, while she dealt the hands. They were forming another table from among the arrivals from the billiard-room, Kempton, Mrs. De Witt and Miss Van Sciver. But Réné would not play, so they took on Tommy McCall, while Réné sank into a chair at the other table behind Mrs. Garriott's partner, De Witt. In the other room Abby Kempton, with the aid of a manual, was giving Brooke Garriott his first lesson at the game, showing him the leads, makes and discards, at "trump" and "no trump," while he watched her hands flitting over the table, more observant of the prettiness of her more palpable wrists and fingers than of the intricate byways of the maze into which she was leading him.

"Is it absolutely necessary?" he asked finally.

"What?"

"Bridge. It seems to me you waste a lot of time."

"What is time to a grasshopper?" she laughed.

"I think I'd rather talk."

"Oh, talk is all right—if you have something to say. Most of us haven't anything to say. Bridge was sent direct from heaven especially for us. Horrors! The dreadful evenings people used to spend in the drawing-room, half asleep with heavy dining, yawning into handkerchiefs, waiting for the time to go home! See those children in the cardroom. Nothing in the world that I am aware of was better contrived to keep them out of mischief."

Garriott followed her gaze. The moment was well timed, for De Land and Natalie were engaged at wireless telegraphy, forgetful that the current they had established could carry in other directions.

"There seem to be at least two of them who are not aware of it," he said dryly.

"Poor Réné," she sighed. "He has loved so many so madly."

"Mrs. Garriott knows what is best, of course," he said slowly. "I would rather, however, that she had not asked him here. But then, I suppose I'm prejudiced—perhaps a little jealous, too—of his looks and training."

He turned toward her suddenly, and lowered his voice. "What is it, Mrs. Kempton, that a woman most wants in a man?"

She fingered idly at the cards before her. "What I really think a woman most wants is for a man to make '*grand slam*' with a '*chicane.*' "

She had the faculty of putting him in a good humor at once.

"You're too truthful to be pleasant," he laughed.

"I've got '*chicane*' all right. But how to take a trick with it is more than I can guess."

"Perhaps your ignorance is a blessing in disguise. A bad bridge player frequently confounds his opponents by his bewildering incapacity."

"You make me hopeful. When it comes to pleasing a woman, I'm the only human blunderbuss. Will you try to teach me? I'll not explode if you handle me with care."

"I don't know," she said doubtfully. "I can only teach you what will please one woman. I'm frank to confess I can't tell what will please Natalie."

"I'm sure at least of one thing that does *not* please her."

She questioned.

"My presence. If I cut *that* out, I may become popular in time."

"But that's at our expense."

"Oh, you won't mind. I'm only an incident here. It doesn't take much imagination to see that. I'm not coming very often. I wouldn't have come to-day, if it hadn't been necessary to see my wife on business. But I find that seeing one's wife is one thing; getting near enough to talk with her is another."

"Oh, you're frightfully old-fashioned," she laughed. "You'll never do at all. You'll have to learn to shoot occasion on the wing. Jack and I hold our business conferences at the opera."

"I'd like to get on with her. It would make things easier all around. But she fairly bristles at the sight of me."

"Perhaps you're too gentle——" She stopped to quote:

"Tender-handed stroke a nettle,
And it stings you for your pains;
Grasp it like a man of mettle,
And it soft as silk remains."

He shook his head and laughed. "I guess I've struck another species," he said, "or perhaps I'm the wrong kind of mettle."

"I warned you I didn't know what would please Natalie. I don't think she knows herself."

"De Land," he said.

She glanced toward the cardroom, where a rubber had just been concluded. Dudley De Witt was scowling at the score. He didn't like to lose. Bad bridge reacted upon his digestive tract.

"My dear Natalie," they heard him say, "if we play as we sit, you must take a brace. Twice you've given me curious leads. And that last make in no trump"—he held up a thin hand—"suicide, really. We shall lose some money."

Mrs. Garriott took the rebuke with a smile.

"It's Réné, I think. Won't you make him go, Dudley? He's like a skeleton at a feast."

"Or in a closet?" suggested Réné calmly.

"By all means stay, Réné," put in Mrs. Wetherall. "Another rubber like that, and I'll have won the cost of a new power boat."

De Land got to his feet with a laugh, and lounged out toward the billiard-room. Garriott followed him with his eyes. Neither Natalie's entrance nor De

Land's, or the undercurrent of meaning, had escaped either Garriott or Mrs. Kempton. The latter put the cards in their case and arose.

"I'm going up," she said. "Natalie wants me to exercise 'Hilarious,' and I'm starting early." As he went with her to the hallway, she laid a hand on his sleeve as she whispered, "My friend, remember."

Garriott nodded and laughed. "I'm only half-host. I need be only half-civil."

From her step she smiled down at him over her shoulder.

"Good night," she said, "and pleasant dreams."

It was characteristic of Garriott to face a problem squarely, so he followed the sound of clicking billiard-balls down the corridor to the wing where he found Mr. De Land practicing massé shots. His guest looked up in surprise, but he smiled and said easily, "Hello, Garriott; will you play a string?"

Garriott stopped to push a button near the door. "I'd rather chat. You don't mind, do you?"

Mr. De Land leaned over the table again, carefully placing the balls for a difficult shot. In a leisurely way he chalked his cue. He had been bearded by husbands before, often with more reasons for inquietude than now, and he was accustomed to carry off such situations gracefully. But there was something in the solid bulk of the man before him, the uncompromising sturdiness of his general appearance, which made him prepare for different standards. After he had made the shot, he looked up lazily over the smoke of his cigarette, and put down his cue.

"Not in the least," he said. "Shall we sit down?"

A servant appeared and took Garriott's order. There were two comfortable wicker chairs near the French window. Garriott motioned to one and took the other. De Land threw away his cigarette, drew his case from his pocket, proffered it to Garriott, who refused to smoke, took one himself, and lit it at the brazier. The servant returned with a tray, took a table from a nest in the corner and arranged it between the two men with glasses, ice, and the decanter of Scotch, and then silently withdrew. They raised their liquor, nodded all in dumb-show, and then Garriott broke the silence.

"As an intimate friend of Mrs. Garriott's, of course you know her reasons for marrying," he began. "And since she found it necessary to marry outside of her own circle to obey the will of her guardian, it shouldn't make much difference to her friends who it was she married. The main fact is, that she is married, and that I'm her husband."

"I don't think any of us are disposed to dispute that," said De Land courteously.

Garriott's eyes closed a little.

"Are you sure of that? Under the circumstances, you can't blame me for being sensitive. Legally, of course, there's no room for dispute. And morally—I believe I'm almost willing to take a lenient view of your opinions."

Mr. De Land's eyebrows raised a little at the inner corners, and he tolerantly flicked off the ash of his cigarette, but he made no comment.

"Mrs. Garriott has some good friends," went on Garriott, "and my occasional appearances should make little change in her life or theirs. The only point on which I have insisted——"

"Is this necessary?" broke in the other coldly. "I can't see——"

"I'm coming to that. The point on which I insist is that while Mrs. Garriott is my wife her friends must give me the same consideration they would have shown to the man of her choice."

"Meaning—me?" said De Land, with cool effrontery.

Garriott's jaws came together with a snap. "Precisely—meaning *you*. I'm glad I don't have to waste any words. And there's no need for misunderstanding. You love Mrs. Garriott, and she——"

"If you'll pardon me," broke in the other with a scornful lift of the chin, "there's a deference due the name of a woman. I protest——"

"It's my name, too," said Garriott sharply. "I use it as I like. Mrs. Garriott has given me the impression that she also——"

"Well, what if she does," broke in De Land querulously. "We were friends as boy and girl. We've always been friends. It is nothing surprising that friendship should have grown to something stronger, is it?" He stopped suddenly. "See here, Garriott, I don't propose to have my relations with Mrs. Garriott questioned."

"Then you'd better be careful to do nothing that will make them questioned," Garriott put in. "It seems to me it's up to you. You're in love with my wife,

but you don't show it much by putting her in a false position with her husband—yes, I mean what I say—spending half the evening alone with her in the garden, as you have been doing, doesn't seem to accord with my reading of the proper rules of the game."

De Land rose and glanced at his host. What did he know? Had some one seen them? Garriott's face told nothing. It was safer for De Land to keep his poise, so he laughed; and on his feet he felt at a greater advantage.

"Upon my word, Garriott, you use pretty strong language. I don't deny my love for Mrs. Garriott, and I don't affirm it. In fact, I'm very doubtful as to the propriety of discussing the matter. I don't feel that any legal claim you may have to Mrs. Garriott's confidences would give you any right to mine. Sentimentally, you know, I don't see how you come in at all. You could certainly not deny Mrs. Garriott's right to ask whomever she pleases, here or anywhere else. You'll pardon me if I add that you're giving yourself undue trouble trying to forbid the privileges of a friendship as old as ours. I'm not aware that Mrs. Garriott has tried to restrict *your* friendships. If she *did* try, I can hardly believe you to be the man to be a party to any such injustice. You have thought best to talk freely to me, so you can't blame me for meeting you on even terms, though I think it's all in pretty bad taste. If Mrs. Garriott chooses to talk of me to you, that is her affair, and pardonable under the circumstances, but even that doesn't give *me* the right to

talk to you about *her*. I don't make a practice of discussing women with men—even with their husbands, Garriott. It would be very much pleasanter to me, therefore, if you will bring the personal part of this interview to an end."

His insolence was admirable. He brought all the habits of his foreign training, all the distinguishing tricks in manner and speech of his class—the broad *a*, the modish gesture, the stilted speech—to bear on the man before him, matching his sophistry against Garriott's strength, his graceful irony against Garriott's simplicity, conscious that he cut a brilliant figure against so sombre a background. His host listened quietly, his eyes half closed, his jaw a little firmer, missing nothing, growing each moment firmer in his conviction of De Land's presumption.

"I'm not ready to end it yet," he said calmly. "When I've finished I'll tell you. I want you to understand one thing, De Land, and that is that I'm not a fool. I've come to you here because I wanted to be open and aboveboard, and because I wanted to give you the chance to be the same. It doesn't strike me you're meeting me in that spirit. Suit yourself. But remember that I'm going to exercise whatever rights the law has given me to keep my house in order. I shall be no stumbling block to Mrs. Garriott's old friendships, but ancient sentimental attachments will be, from this day, barred. Do you understand?"

The quick shrug of De Land's shoulders was half of indifference, half of contempt, but he swallowed uneasily.

"If Mrs. Garriott wishes our friendship discontinued, she'll probably tell me so."

"I'm afraid you'll have to rely on me for that. Mrs. Garriott and I might differ as to a cause for discontinuing it. We don't always agree. But you can be sure of one thing: if you behave yourself, you're as sure of a welcome here as in any other house in New York."

By this time the poise of Garriott's guest was tottering. His contempt of Garriott's authority and opinions had fallen lightly on that gentleman's broad shoulders. It seemed almost as though De Land had not spoken at all.

"Thanks," he said, trying to keep his temper. "And are you to be the censor of my behavior?"

"Oh, I hope not. There won't be any need to have it censored, if you understand what I've been talking about."

"I understand only one thing—and that is that you've gone out of your way to insult a guest in your own house."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Garriott broke in coolly. "It is the last thing I had in mind. You're necessary here, more a part of the social scheme even than I, but since I *am* here, I thought we could clear the atmosphere by a quiet understanding, which would make it possible to enjoy it together."

"That isn't possible," muttered De Land. "By this time it must be fairly obvious to you, Garriott, that this marriage has in no way altered the conditions which existed three weeks ago. Under the law, Natalie

Judson is your wife; but no human law can ever change the fact that she still cares for me."

"She has told you that?"

Mr. De Land laughed and shrugged his shoulders, but he made no answer.

Garriott now had risen and was eying his guest curiously, an ominous glitter in the shadow of his heavy brows.

"Perhaps you're right, De Land. We never could understand each other. You belong to a different breed of man from anything I've ever been used to. You've got plenty of nerve. It's a pity you don't apply it to a more useful purpose than the pursuit of mis-mated wives. I'm not going to say anything more except this: Follow my advice, and we'll get along; otherwise——" He paused, took up his glass and drained it at a gulp. "Otherwise we'll not get along," he finished grimly.

They faced each other in silence, just on the outer edge of the rim of the cone of light over the billiard table, unaware of the figure that had entered the room a while before, and now stood in the shadow at the other side, trembling with anger and misgiving. In the tense silence which followed Garriott's threat, they heard her gasp, turned with one accord, and saw her. Garriott took a step, but she came forward into the circle of light and faced him, dark-eyed and pale, her expression set in lines which took on an unpleasant distinctness in the streaming glare of the bulbs beside her.

"So you've been discussing me?" she said, her voice

trembling with resentment. "You've been making common talk of my affairs?"

Garriott leaned against the table, his arms folded, looking soberly at the floor. De Land had taken up a cue, and was examining it in silence.

"Even a savage has a code of hospitality," Mrs. Garriott went on. "Do you think it fair—do you think it honorable or decent—what you have done to my guest? Is there any excuse for insulting a visitor in your own house? Haven't you anything to say?"

"It seems I've almost said enough," he said slowly. "I don't think there need be anything further. If, Mr. De Land understands——"

"I think I understand. I'm leaving at once," put in the latter, setting down his cue. "If you don't mind, Natalie——" He bowed and went toward the door.

But she intercepted him. "No, no, Réné, you mustn't go. You are to stay here. It's a matter of pride with me. Promise me you won't leave 'The Grange'."

"I don't see very well, how——"

"Promise me—at least, not until to-morrow——"

But De Land bowed and was gone.

Mrs. Garriott walked over to her husband, pointing to the door through which De Land had gone.

"That is a gentleman's reply," she said.

The accent on the word did not escape him, but he let it pass.

"There was another reply, a better one—to stay—to eat my bread and salt—and be worthy of it."

"You mean that he——"

"That he has carried the war into my camp, with your permission, with your help."

She paled at that.

"I——" she stammered.

"Do you think that only the moon and stars can see what is written in the moonlight?"

"You saw? You spied? Oh——"

From the startled look in his face she knew that she had said too much. He quickly came one step nearer, roughly took her by the arms, and held her before him in the light, his dark eyes searching her face. She shrank away from his touch, then yielded passively, and bore his scrutiny without flinching, seeking his eyes with her own, that he might look in them and find there the proof of her honesty.

At last his hands dropped to his sides, and he turned away. "No," he said quietly, "I did not spy. I didn't see anything but what the others saw. But it seemed enough. I think that even if I had been there I could not know better what happened. But was it necessary to create the opportunity, when I had made up my mind to try to see things your way—to help you to bear what has proven to be such a trial, such a terrible mistake for both of us? Do you think you are doing your duty?"

"I owe you nothing," she muttered sullenly. She lowered her head and would not look at him. She was thinking of that other night on the terrace. "No matter what I did, our accounts would still be unbalanced."

He understood.

"Then settle them with me—with him you're only harming yourself."

"That is not true," she said. "No one can harm me as you have harmed me."

It was his turn to lower his eyes, and she was not slow to continue her advantage. "I could never forgive you for that, nor for this discourtesy to my guest."

"No matter how much he deserved it?"

"That is my affair—not yours. You must apologize."

The old defiant note in her voice aroused him.

"Well, hardly."

"You must ask him to stay—to-morrow," she persisted.

"No."

"Then he shall stay in spite of you," she retorted furiously. "He shall stay. He will do what I say."

Garriott repressed the reply that was on his lips, walked toward the door, and stood there.

"Go to bed. You're tired. Perhaps to-morrow we may both think differently."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, ugly words on the tip of her tongue, but with a struggle she controlled herself and went past him, head erect and eyes flaming.

"Good-night," he said pleasantly.

But there was no reply.

CHAPTER XI

MORNING

GARRIOTT realized that the timely appearance of his wife had prevented an outburst, which might have led to immediate and serious consequences. It was not until she left the billiard room that he was conscious of the tension of his nerves. He threw himself into a chair, took from a pocket of his evening clothes a bag of cheap tobacco, filled a short, black pipe, and was soon enveloped in its familiar, plebeian fumes. A servant looked in. "Go to bed," said Garriott. "I'll put out the lights."

He stretched himself at full length and frowned in a futile fashion at his boots. There seemed no further necessity to disguise the fact that he had fallen in love with his wife. He could not for his life have told why it was he loved her. He had had an old-fashioned idea that the course of love was like the juncture of two meandering meadow streams, which, following natural conformations, come together at last and go onward to the sea without a ripple to mark their confluence. His relations with his wife filled none of these conditions, but that made no difference in his state of mind. He loved her for a thousand things—her arrogance and temper, her grace, beauty,

and the very extravagances which he had been trained to distrust. He could not forget the touch of her lips, the silky softness of her dainty draperies. They haunted him by day in the dusty blue haze of his workshop, and by night in the silence of his lonely quarters in town. In spirit she visited him there, always angry, proud and tyrannical. He could understand now why Oliver Judson had loved to provoke her to rage. There was a splendor in the red flash of her anger only half suggested in the petulance of her sulky beauty. The periods of gentleness, in which he had known her, brief as they were, had served only to bring her possibilities for passion into higher relief. She hated him cordially, and had so far missed no opportunity to make him aware of it. Was all this a part of Oliver Judson's plan? It seemed that the shadow of the old man hung over their fates, and Garriott could almost summon into life his sardonic grin, as he watched the slow development of the drama. Garriott had never been a sentimental young man. There had been no time in his plodding work-a-day life for romance. The only poetry he had known were the epics of steam and speed and the steel-shod wheel. The greatest things in the world to him were the crucible and the forge. They seemed the complete expression of the dynamic possibilities of man's intelligence. Success was his god, and there had been no goddesses. Work was his only passion, and it alarmed him to realize that this strange new idol had brought something into his life which might prove a serious impediment to the orderly consummation of his plans.

Nothing of the surface indications of the relations between De Land and his wife had been lost on him, and Natalie had confirmed his certainty of a recurrence of love passages between them. He was glad he had spoken, and would speak again, if necessary, in tones which would be even more convincing. In the West, where he came from, men still resorted to the primitive methods of their forbears. Garriott couldn't help smiling as he thought of the careless jauntiness of De Land's figure. It was of the same proportions as his own. De Land was wiry and strong; he rode to hounds and played tennis; but what chance had he with a fellow who could swing a sledge or coal a freight-engine on a mountain run, as Garriott had done. Garriott critically clasped and unclasped his large, bony fingers. Garriott could have crushed him like an egg-shell.

But that was a puerile thought, and he was glad Natalie had come in in time. The more he pondered, the more he was convinced that the solution of the situation lay with his wife herself. Strong-arm play was about as much out of place in this effete circle as Winthrop Townsend's monocle would have been in the workshop. If there was anything further to be said, it must be said in a different way. It was at Mr. Northrop's suggestion that he had come to "The Grange," for Mrs. Garriott's sudden extravagances required a more strict accounting of the sum set aside for her personal use. It seemed she believed their sources of income to be limitless. Garriott had only to threaten a refusal of her demands to place her in an

awkward position; but if the thought came into his mind, he summarily dismissed it. He had felt from the beginning that Oliver Judson's money was more hers than his, and, aside from the sums he needed for his experiments, would have been glad to place his share of it at her disposal. As it was, he had already opened an account of his own at a national bank, which he proposed to use as a reserve fund for his wife, if she should need it. He had hoped at "The Grange" to win her to reason by friendly advice, but now it seemed as though her open defiance of his wishes made enmity the only thing possible.

With an abrupt movement, he rose and knocked out the ashes of his pipe. One thing was certain. Natalie must never know how things were with him. Instinct told him that. If open enmity was the only cloak for his misfortune, he must bear it—if he could. He put out the light, and went up to his rooms. Tibbott awaited him, but he had no thought of sleep, so he dismissed the man, got into dressing gown and slippers, then refilled his pipe, picked up a book, and threw himself into an easy chair by the fire Tibbott had kindled, which still flickered from the hickory log. Idly he turned the pages of the volume. Why should Oliver Judson have cared for Epictetus? A line caught his eye: "To a reasonable creature, that alone is insupportable which is unreasonable; but everything reasonable may be supported." That never was meant for Natalie—was it meant for him? And again: "Were I a nightingale, I would act the part of a nightingale; were I a swan, the part of a swan."

Yes, but suppose one were a crow.

Garriott let the book fall into his lap. In the obscurity beyond the glow from the lamp he could see the formal, inscrutable lines of the Bolted Door. Beyond it were darkness and silence.

But no problems, however important, could avail to rob Garriott of his sleep, and if he awoke at sunrise it was rather the assertion of his work-a-day habits, than the result of any unusual mental disturbance. The level rays of the sun, which shot across his bed through the curtains he had opened the night before, for a last glimpse of the pensive moon, awoke him abruptly, and he tumbled out, all the cobwebs swept from his brain, rejoicing in the glory of the day. It made him glad, too, to steal a march on Tibbott. In a moment he was glowing in the cold marble shower off the dressing room, where the work of regeneration was completed.

Thus it was that when Mrs. Kempton paced the terrace waiting for the groom to bring up "Hilarious," Brooke Garriott appeared in some borrowed plumage and offered himself as cavalier. There was no need to conceal her pleasure, so she welcomed him with her rosiest smile.

"I didn't know you rode," she said.

"I've always ridden, but I don't think I'm what you call good form," he laughed. "But I think I can stick, even on a hunting saddle. I'm used to a McClellan, so if I slip off behind, don't stop for me. What do you think of my togs? You haven't said. Uncle

Oliver's. He never wore 'em. I hope he won't mind. If all dead men's boots fit as badly as these, their wearers are not to be envied."

She noted the irony of his humor, but made no comment. They were passing down the drive to the gate, the horses shaking their heads, furiously pulling at the reins, eager to be off. Abby Kempton was riding man-fashion, and in spite of the sidling and pirouetting of the thoroughbred, held her seat with a firmness which excited the admiration of her companion. (She was secretly giving "Hilarious" her heel, but Garriott couldn't know that.)

They were off the macadam in a moment, and a stretch of dirt road lay before them, ending in a long rise of ground—the very thing for a "breather." Abby Kempton pointed forward with her crop, and was off in a flash, Garriott thundering after her. But it was no race, for Garriott's weight was too much of a handicap for "Bramble," and all the way the dust and gravel from the fleeter heels of "Hilarious" flew back in his face, and he finished a bad second. The winner drew rein and waited for her companion, who came up, laughing boyishly as he shook the dirt out of his hat and coat collar.

"We're not in the blue-ribbon class, I reckon. I feel as though I'd been through a sand blast."

"You're lucky it wasn't mud. Oh! what a heavenly morning."

They had reached the level in the midst of an apple orchard, and came to an open spot, from which the harbor and Sound were visible. Emerging in pale grays

and purples from beneath the long streaks of mist, above which the tree-tops thrust their branches, making wonderful islands adrift in cloudland. From the distant village arose the blue smoke from early chimneys, adding another delicate shade to the pale landscape. The birds were noisily busy about their breakfasts, and a distant locomotive called sharply. There were no other sounds but the heavy breathing of their horses and the clattering of the bits.

"Life looks like a valley from a mountain-top, doesn't it? I know now why the birds are all so happy. Don't you feel like twittering, Mr. Garriott?"

"Nobody can be old at six in the morning, on a day like this. Isn't it good. I'm glad I'm alive." He filled his lungs with the cool, salty air. "It's like being born all over again. Wouldn't it be great if we *could* begin at the beginning, with the wisdom of experience."

"Yes," she sighed.

But it was no hour for minor notes. He had a question framed, when she suddenly raised her head, with a quick, bright look, and in a moment they were off again, this time at a long swinging canter, which brought them down to the Harbor Road, that reached out toward the inlet and the Sound. Here they drew rein again, and walked their horses along the pebbly beach. A steam yacht was nosing a way through the inlet, a large boat, schooner-rigged, with a black hull, yellow stack, and brown fittings. Abby Kempton watched it curiously.

"That looks like the *Alicia*," she said. "I thought the Penningtons were abroad."

"It *is* the *Alicia*," returned Garriott dryly. "Mrs. Garriott is leasing her for a few months. It's costing something, too."

"Don't you care for a sea-going boat?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose I would. There are lots of things I could care for, if I gave myself the chance. Frankly, we can't afford it—not this year. As I understand it, we are already committed to one sunken garden, one Neo-Grec swimming-pool, one new ninety-horsepower racing machine, and an assorted lot of Irish terriers and French poodles. That's going some in a year of reduced incomes. *Now*, Mrs. Garriott must have the *Alicia*. Who is going to pay for her, nobody seems to know. Northrop doesn't, unless we draw upon the principal account. My expenses are not large, but they add a few pennies to the general deficit."

"How tiresome. Have you spoken to her?"

"That's why I'm here. But under the circumstances I don't think anything I can say will weigh heavily with Mrs. Garriott. I don't expect her to listen to me. I'll only bring one more opportunity for discord. God knows, there are enough already."

She eyed him curiously. He hadn't scrupled to hide his feelings, and there was a tinge of contempt in his tone, that gave her a glimpse of his character from another angle. He had always seemed such a big, good-humored boy. It was a pity if his marriage to Natalie was to make him any less wholesome.

"You know, Mr. Garriott," she said slowly, "you and Natalie are worrying me a great deal. Each of you seems to be taking particular pains to do deliberately the things that will cause you misfortune. In a way, I'm responsible. If I had let you go back to the West, when you planned to, perhaps this marriage wouldn't have taken place."

"I'm sure it wouldn't. I think I must have done it to please you."

"You mustn't talk like that," she cried. "You know it isn't true. I can't take more than my share of the responsibility. You were in love with her then, or you wouldn't have married her."

He laughed obstinately. "I married her because you told me to. I'm sure I did. I can't find any other reason."

She lowered her eyes before his.

"You love her now," she persisted soberly, "more than ever. I'm not easily deceived. It would be amusing, if it weren't quite sad. Life is a curious mixture of opposites. Love and hate are much like laughing and crying, Mr. Garriott—you can do them both at the same time. Oh, I don't blame you for hiding your feelings. It wouldn't do for Natalie to know just now. She's sophisticating. She gives every appearance of disliking you a great deal, but then, that may be an early symptom of loving you quite madly."

"Hardly—besides, she's in love with another man."

"Oh, Réné! Every married woman in the younger set loves him at one time or another. Réné is like

measles or mumps—catching in the early stages. Natalie has a worse case than usual, but she isn't going to die."

"There ought to be an anti-toxin—a serum for that."

"There is. A husband—a real husband——" She stopped and laughed. "Tell me—I'm wild with curiosity—what did you say to Réné last night?"

"I? Oh, er—nothing," he stammered.

"You must have said it with singular effectiveness. Did you know he was leaving 'The Grange' this morning?"

Garriott started. "You can't mean it! Who told you?" he demanded.

"My maid. He ordered a trap last night. He's taking the early train. I thought I wouldn't tell you until we got off. You might have been tempted to speed the parting guest."

He flicked at a tree branch with his crop.

"I didn't think he'd do that," he said. "I gave him his chance, and thought he'd stay. I'm afraid, Mrs. Kempton, that this case is a little too serious to be classed with the baby diseases."

"Oh, cheer up. After all, there are many worse things in the world than death under the lash of a woman's scorn."

"Yes, but it's much sweeter to live under the dominion of a woman's smile," he said, raising his eyes to hers. And then after a pause: "I don't know why you have been so good to me, Mrs. Kempton. I'm sure, I've done nothing to deserve it. I've never had a woman's interest before, and I've never cared enough

to give any woman mine. I wonder what I can ever do for you. I'm not very clever with women, but it seems to me you're a little too wise to waste your wit in cynicism. I wish Jack understood you better. I don't think he knows what a lot he misses."

"What does it matter, as long as Jack doesn't know he misses it?"

There was silence, a little constrained between them, and they both looked out across the harbor, where the gulls were swaying about the wake of the *Alicia.* But when, later, he stole a look, he found her face turned brightly towards his own. Impulsively he thrust forth his hand. "Let's swear an eternal friendship," he pleaded. "I need you. Perhaps some day you may need me."

She took the hand he offered her, with frank warmth, and though she turned her head away again, he could see the moisture that hung for a moment on her eyelashes. But she brushed it away, laughing nervously.

"I never did that before. How childish! I can't be well——"

"Forgive me, please forgive me," he broke in.

"Of course, there's nothing to forgive. They say there's a luxury in tears. I actually believe it's so. I think I like them, but they're awfully salty, aren't they?"

She did not look at him again just then, for her heel touched "Hilarious," and she shot by him suddenly, and was out of sight around the turn in the beach, before he realized that she was gone, and, although "Bramble" took up the chase willingly enough,

at the top of a hill a mile away "Hilarious" still led by fifty yards. Garriott called to her to stop, but she did not hear him, or would not listen, and when at last he drew up beside her, the smile with which she greeted him contained no trace of their sentimental moment. In fact, he noted a scornful twist at her lips, which made him think that their eternal friendship had been only an infelicitous phrase, and her voice, when she next spoke, had a hard little ring which sounded strangely unfamiliar. "Well, what are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"About what?"

"Why, Natalie, of course."

"Oh, I'll see her this morning, deliver my message from Northrop, and then——" he stopped.

"And then?"

"And then get back to work."

The frown on Mrs. Kempton's face deepened, and the scorn in her voice was unmistakable.

"Men are such fools—such cowards; ready to tilt at a windmill, or fly at the sight of their own shadows! The man was never invented who was meant to be a husband! Is it any wonder that women make the mistakes they do—or any wonder that there are men like Réné De Land, who hang like jackals on the edge of the outer darkness, waiting—waiting—— Oh! I've no patience with you. You are all alike, ready with suspicion, distrust, or with indifference. You'll go back to the city, and bury your head like the ostrich. Go, if you like, but I'll not answer for Natalie," she finished.

He heard her through with amazement, much disturbed.

"What else can I do?" he muttered half angrily. "When I'm in New York she is at peace. So am I. Here I am afraid—afraid for myself, but more afraid for *her*."

Mrs. Kempton lowered her head, and closed her eyes. The deep note that sounded in his voice stirred her. He did not see the tightening of her gloved hand, or the pressure of her lips. He only knew another change had come into her manner, and felt her gauntleted hand over his own, and her soft voice pleading, "Stay, Mr. Garriott, at least for a few days. Perhaps I can really help. Natalie seems to lean on me at times. Some women are won by kindness, some by cruelty, others still by a mingling of the two. Won't you stay? At least for Mrs. Schuyler's party? You've been working too hard; you look tired and worried."

"I'll look more tired if I stay. I feel like a fool here."

"Fortune favors fools, they say. Perhaps she'll smile on you in the height of your folly. Give her a chance. Promise me you'll not go."

For answer he turned the palm of his hand to take her own, which had again rested lightly on his. But his eyes frowned at the towers of "The Grange," which were now visible through the foliage at the end of the row of maples, which lined their path.

CHAPTER XII

PLAYING WITH FIRE

IN spite of the instinct which had warned him that the life of these luxurious people was not for him, Brooke Garriott had yielded at last to the petitions of his social mentor, and had reluctantly promised to go on Thursday night to the Gerry Schuyler's, who were giving a Fête Champêtre. Natalie and her husband were at daggers drawn. His relations with her were scarcely improved by the departure of Mr. De Land, and the business interview which she had grudgingly granted him had resulted, as he had foreseen, in further misunderstanding. He had delivered his message in a coldly impersonal manner, but she had angrily cut him short.

"If Mr. Northrop wishes to give me the benefit of his advice," she had stormed at him, "let him come to see me himself. I don't recognize your right to question my habits or my plans."

"I don't question them. I simply state facts. You've already spent your balance and most of mine. I'll have enough, of course, but I would suggest——"

"You'll pardon me, but I prefer to choose my own advisers. I've no doubt that there will be a way to find more money. And at least, what I spend will not

be wasted in idle experiments. I shall live as I have always done—for myself and for my friends."

There was nothing left to be said. Brooke Garriott had bowed and left the room, chilled and disillusioned. However valiant his bearing in her company, in secret he writhed at the outcome of their venture. He could not understand how he still loved her, when every nerve in him rebelled at her soulless frivolity. What was it that still chained him? Her beauty. It could not be that. Her charm? Hardly. Or was it only pique because he had not won her. Measured by the intensity of his own feelings, he knew it was something more fateful than these. It seemed as though he alone had peered into the depths of her spirit, and caught there glimpses of secret virtues, of warm, kindly impulses, of homely goodness, purity and moral courage. They were every woman's birthright. If she lost them on her way through the mazes of life, the fault was with society. He was a shrewder judge of men than of women, but it seemed very certain that the ways she was choosing could only lead to misfortune. Her set was rotten. All its men had histories, all its women mysteries—a set, in short, in which it took unusual cleverness—or unusual virtue—to be virtuous. If Natalie had betrayed no sign of weakness in her relations with him—that was only an indication of the degree of her dislike for him. What time and a hazy moral atmosphere might do for her was better left unthought of. Only one side of her character had been revealed to him, but whether the other was to prove fair or ugly, his duty was clear. She was his

wife. He must trust her. If evil came, he must take his share of the blame.

Abby Kempton caught him on the rebound. When he left the library he sent a note to her rooms:

"The *Vas-y* is waiting. Won't you go with me?"

And in half an hour—dressed in flannels and a motor cap, she joined him on the terrace. Soon they were flying toward the harbor mouth in the little craft, the foam flying high about them, as the low counter of the craft settled down into the seas, which fled astern as the *Vas-y* skimmed like a disk out toward the open waters of the Sound, past the stately *Alicia*, where some sailors leaned over the rail and watched them go by. The engine hummed merrily, and the increasing vibrations showed that the engine was going through her best paces. Even Garriott's professional interest in the performance was not proof against the attractions of his companion, who looked more than usually handsome and amiable. The puzzled wrinkle at his brows had told her of new discomfiture, and, by contrast to the cool enmity of his wife, her friendliness seemed more attractive than ever. Friendship was the greatest thing in the world, he thought. Friendship, after all, was only love bridled. It seemed certain now that his friendship with Mrs. Kempton had qualities which almost atoned for his other misfortunes. She asked him no questions, but talked to him gayly, so that in a while he was as gay as she. With a rare, if mordant humor, she went over the failings and foibles of the people he had met or was to meet, omit-

ting none, sparing none, not even her husband or herself.

"I'm afraid Jack has degenerated since you knew him at college. I think I've had a bad effect on him. It's so easy to degenerate—society offers so many conveniences for disillusionment. I'm sure that in another age Jack would love me quite as madly as ever, but this isn't the century of romance. Love is only a mood, after all, and moods don't last. That's lucky, in a way, because love ages one so—and the only crime nowadays is to grow old. That's Mrs. Wetherall's misfortune. She's been trying all her life to keep up with the fashions in husbands, and it's worn on her. Addison Grange, her first, had red hair—you remember the Titian rage—but poor Addison died, or lost his money, I forget which, so she took Gilbert Darrow. He was very good looking, but quite worthless, and when he went into the ministry, she married Wetherall. Any one could have told her they would disagree, and now she's looking around for a fourth. Poor woman! She's beginning to look like a Gothic ruin."

"Can you wonder?"

"I often offer her as an object lesson to Nina De Witt. Poor Nina is quite another sort. There are really possibilities in Nina. She loves life so—and Tommy is about the only thing she has left."

"Her husband?" he inquired.

"Oh, Dudley—Dudley is a mere anatomy, a pathological specimen. I'm awfully sorry for him, but I'm

sorry for Tommy, too. They don't get along at all. It's very sad. All the world loves a lover—but the woman's husband."

"Yes, I know——"

But she went on heedlessly. "Dudley will really live to be a thousand. Dyspeptics always do. It's very selfish of him, because Nina and Tommy are awfully in love. Divorce wouldn't do, because Tommy hasn't nearly enough for two. That's the misfortune of having expensive tastes, and they're both fond of the flesh-pots."

"You mean De Witt stands for this sort of thing?"

"What can he do, poor man? He accepts Tommy irritably as a visitation of Providence, just as he accepts his nervous indigestion. He's had them both so long, I suppose he'd be lost without them, but it seems as though something might be done. Nina isn't nearly as clever as Florrie Vanuxem—she was Mrs. Welby-King, you know. She laid a trap for Welby-King, and he went into it. So she managed to get a big slice of his income, which she now shares with Percy." She stopped, her sprightliness dropping from her like a mask. "Oh," she said scornfully, "we're a lovely lot."

It seemed such an easy step from cynicism to bitterness. Garriott wondered that he had never seen her take it, and it set him thinking. Which was the real Abby Kempton? The one who was blithe or the one who was bitter? And which interested him the more? She was a little different from anything feminine in his experience, and the guise of cheerful pessimism which

she habitually wore, always gave him a novel viewpoint, which rescued him from his own infestivity. But the brief flashes he had caught from the clearer depths below the surface, aroused an interest which her gay comradeship, no matter how clever, had never inspired. There were moments when she was so worldly that he gave her up in despair—moments when she seemed to live only for the present, so long as it amused her, jibing at temperance, and ready with a sneer at obtrusive virtue. Even then, her cleverness kept the battalions on her own side, for Brooke was not without a sense of humor. She seemed to have forgotten, and, leaning on the gunwale, was looking aft alongside into the foaming seas—was this the real woman, or only a materialist caught in the gossamer meshes of immateriality.

For a time Garriott made no reply, but busied himself with the engine. There was nothing for him to say. He agreed with her perfectly. They *were* unlovely.

"You may think me tiresome," he ventured at last, "or provincial, if you like, but it strikes me you people don't get the worth of your money. You spend most of your lives hunting new sensations, inventing expensive excitements, flirting with danger, and enduring vice, because it is the fashion to be vicious. But since I've been in New York I haven't met one of you with the nerve to sin grandly for sin's sake. You sin as you do most other things, half-heartedly, with one eye on the gallery. Personally, I think it pays best to be decent, but if I ever reached the condition of mind

when decency ceased to be a possibility, I don't think I'd be willing to stop at half-measures."

"Perhaps we're wiser than you." She smiled. "Unless whole measures succeed, they wholly fail. I think I'd rather be half-hearted than broken-hearted."

"There's no excuse for you to be either. You have everything in the world a woman can wish for, but I think the best gift you have is conscience."

His reading of her character pleased her, not so much because it was true, as because it showed her that he thought of her. His drawl had never seemed more ingenuous—his admiration more candid. His voice sounded like an echo from the far Arcadia she had forgotten. So sweet it was that the coquette in her couldn't resist an appeal for more.

"You are so wise, Brooke Garriott, so wise! There's no wisdom like the intuition of inexperience. Am I so easy to read?"

"No. When you scoff, I can't understand you at all. So I don't try. I spend most of my time wondering why you waste your talents."

"Have you thought that perhaps I don't want to be understood? When a woman is understood, she loses her last weapon of defense."

He gave the wheel a twist before he replied.

"It seems to me," he said slowly, "I'd rather understand the people I make my friends. And friends don't need weapons of any kind."

She sank into the seat beside the wheel, and looked out across the wide expanse of water. "I'm glad you think I have talents," she sighed. "But they haven't

done me much good. I seem to make failures of everything." And then, after a pause: "I hope that won't be the fate of our friendship."

She was gentle again, and very pliable and womanly, and her voice awoke a quick compassion. Her hand was on the freeboard beside him, and he put his own over it and held it there.

"Nothing can make a failure of that," he assured her softly.

"Nothing?" She repeated the word mechanically, but the inflection of her voice made it a question.

"So far as I can see—nothing."

Her fingers tightened a little in his own, but she said nothing more, for she knew better than he that their friendship was in danger. She was glad that he didn't know it, though every word he said to her made it easier for her to understand.

"I want to help you, when you're in trouble," he went on, "just as you have helped me. I want you to let me know you without the social tinsel—just the woman and the man. Friendship must be undiluted. That's the kind of friendships I have in the West, Mrs. Kempton. John O'Dowd is the roughest Irishman in the Alleghanies, but he has the heart of a child. Bill Jamison is another. There isn't much I wouldn't do for either of them. I want you to know O'Dowd. He has come on to help with some work of mine. Won't you like to?"

"Yes, I will. I want to see you at work. I'd like to know that side of you. It must be wonderful to dream and have your dreams come true."

His gaze passed her and lingered on the faint blue line of the Connecticut shore.

"If there is any romance in practical mechanics it flies before dust and sweat. I'm trying to do a big thing, and there are countless difficulties in my way. I began it up in the mountains. Some of my tests have failed—some have been successful. But I've got to keep on until they are all successful. But every success, however small, gives untold joy! I suppose it's the way with everything in life. Success won against odds is the only thing worth while. Other things that happen to a fellow are merely incidents—trifles, that he can brush aside, and, after awhile utterly forget——"

She stole a glance at him, and saw that he was absorbed. Both hands gripped the little wheel, which kept the *Vas-y* on her course, but his mind was far away, in the thick of problems of his own, which by his devotion and their unfamiliarity, gave her a new idea of the relation of her life and Natalie's to his. In spite of his boasted friendship, they had never seemed farther asunder.

"Trifles," she broke in, "like love, hatred, or friendship?"

But when he turned contritely, she was laughing at him.

"It was selfish of me," he pleaded. "I forgot how little you understood. Won't you forgive me?"

"I'm afraid men of your class are much alike. Sentiment is only an incident or——"

"We're only human," he insisted. "The pendulum

must swing both ways. A man can't always live on bread and cheese."

"Or without the kisses," she suggested. "And if the kisses are lacking?" He felt her look, and knew it was scornful, but he still looked beyond her, his eyes contracted so that she could see "crows-feet" she had not noticed before.

"Then we must get them when we can."

This time her mirth was uncontrolled. "Really, you'll have to forgive me," she laughed, "but you're so full of surprises. I've been looking up to you as the ideal husband. It seems that even model husbands are modeled out of clay."

"You've misjudged me, that's all," he said.

But she was not to be put aside. "Are you going to disappoint me after all?" she taunted him. "I've been looking to you for an example—an object-lesson in forbearance to stimulate my jaded interest to a new instinct—a real instinct for virtue. I've seen you as Titan—Prometheus with the divine fire—forging weapons to defy the evil forces of the world, a giant of all the virtues. Imagine——" she laughed aloud—"imagine Vulcan on a quest for kisses!"

The picture amused her the more when she found that he did not share her enjoyment.

"Is the idea so repugnant?" he asked hotly. "There are women who would not scorn them. Even Vulcan got Venus."

She hid her eyes from his, and he could not tell whether it was to hide her mirth or another feeling, the nature of which he could but surmise. What really

occupied her was what a dear, queer fish he was, and how quickly he had risen to her bait. But she was wise enough, just then, to make no further casts. The current here she knew was dangerous.

But he would not let the matter rest. His ego still squirmed.

"Do you think that was friendly? Even if I don't appeal to you in that way, you might have spared me the information—because it's probably good for me that I don't appeal to you."

"And good for me," she murmured.

Something in the tone of her voice made him turn and look at her. This time her eyes met his, and the melting softness of them disturbed him strangely. All the warmth of her heart was revealed in them, and something else he had not discovered before, a tremulous wavering of her gaze, and a warm flush at her cheeks, which he had seen elsewhere and recognized. It was not the answer he had expected, and his own gaze flickered, and sought the sea, for he was troubled. That brief moment was all the respite she needed; for when he looked again, to see if he had not been mistaken, he found her laughing at him again, satirical, roguish, all tinsel and superfluities.

"What has friendship to do with kisses," she mocked. "Undiluted friendship—just woman and man friendship—what has that to do with kisses? What's a kiss, after all, to make such a fuss about? Of course, you'll kiss whom you like—that is, of course, everybody, but your wife."

She enjoyed his discomfiture, and he took no pains

to hide it, clinging sombrely to the wheel, with frowns for her laughter, silence for her gayety. They were no longer attune. He had rather liked the idea that Abby Kempton had thought him a Titan. The thought had salved the wounds inflicted by his wife. That was why it hurt when his companion laughed at him.

He swept the wheel over and set the bow of the boat for the harbor. She watched his face amusedly. Mrs. Kempton was herself again. He was so rustic! It seemed almost a pity to take advantage of his simplicity. But she had something at stake, for her jeopardy, though past, had been none the less real while it had lasted, and so she refused to spare him.

"Do you know," she continued, "I think I've spoiled you, Brooke Garriott."

He was scowling glumly and made no reply, so she added mischievously, "You're not thinking of kissing anybody just now, are you?"

"Yes, I am," he replied sullenly. "I'm thinking of kissing you—soon."

That surprised her, and she realized in dismay, that perhaps, he wasn't such a fool as he looked. But she spoke lightly, with a confidence she was far from feeling. "I wish you luck. Who knows when Olympus showers her blessings! I hope you'll warn me."

"I warn you now. I've never played with fire—not the feminine kind—but I think I like it. So you mustn't be surprised if I catch."

"Oh, very well," she said indifferently, over her shoulder. "Only be sure that it isn't a false alarm."

With that shot, which turned his flank and let her

retire with the honors of war, she was silent. But there was no beating of drums nor colors flying. The scarlet signals she had worn were gone from her cheeks, and the beating of her heart was more in apprehension than in triumph.

CHAPTER XIII

AL FRESCO

IT was characteristic of Mrs. Gerry Schuyler that the invitations to her house-warming should be couched in unconventional terms.

"Farmer Schuyler," it read, "and his good wife invite you to a Love Feast and Dairy Dance, on the Ninth of June. Rustic costume, any period. Masque."

Mrs. Schuyler had a genius for original entertainments. When the customary round palled on the jaded tastes of society, she could usually be depended upon to come to its rescue with an idea. She it was who had given the famous dinner, after the horse show, in her husband's perfectly appointed stable, while the horses poked their heads over the stalls and formed a background. Following that was a catnip tea, and pet dog dinner, which proved a hilarious success, until Mrs. Kempton's "Toto" devoured a part of Mrs. Welby-King's Persian kitten, which cast a damper on the festivities. There had been a "*Bête Noir*" cotillion the summer before, and a Baby Party in the fall, where the grown-ups scampered in knickers and short skirts and drank fizz from nursing bottles.

What was to come next? There was a pleasurable uncertainty in the text of the invitation. A Love

Feast might mean little or much, but the postscript, which required a completely hidden identity, seemed to promise excitement. Gerry Schuyler never did things by halves, and the magnificence of his hospitality, which stopped at nothing, had long since atoned for the earlier prejudices against his wife, who had vaulted the social barriers on the prestige of her husband's ancient name, and had conquered its charmed circle by a ready and compelling humor and a shameless virtue, which defied the most profligate of gossipers. She hadn't even had a divorce—Gerry had married her from an art school in Paris—and as long as her husband continued blindly to adore her, there seemed little prospect of one. As it was she enjoyed a unique position in New York society, as a kind of consulting engineer on the machinery of entertainment, and as such had made herself valued at the seats of the mighty—urban and suburban.

On the day preceding Mrs. Schuyler's party there was an air of mystery among the women at "The Grange," as they delved in Mr. Judson's "Racinet" and other costume-books, in the library. The arrival of foreign-looking females, carrying huge pasteboard boxes, had caused new excitements, and their departure was followed by long and secret conferences upstairs, to which the men were not invited. Garriott, De Witt and Townsend had gone to town, but reached "The Grange" by an afternoon train, which gave them time to dress before dinner. They all wandered down rather sheepishly, in their strange plumage, looking neither rustic nor festive, but only uncomfortable, and con-

tinued so during dinner, the saving grace of the presence of the women, who had chosen to dine upstairs—being denied them. Nothing, apparently, had dashed the spirit of Jack Kempton or Tommy McCall, who had had a day of golf, but De Witt and Winthrop Townsend were full of the day's doings in Wall Street, which had been unsatisfactory, and refused to be diverted from their melancholy topic. Garriott was quiet. The day had not gone too well with him. His men had completed all the arrangements for a preliminary test of his new motor truck, when one of the parts of the connecting gear had broken, and left them helpless—at least, until a new piece could be forged. It was little enough in itself—only a matter of a few days' delay—and there were other things to go on with; but he was not in the mood for failure. It seemed that success in his work at the shop was the only thing that could compensate him for his failures elsewhere. He was hardly in the mood to dress like a fool, but he realized in time that his duties as host required an assumption of gayety, and he led the drinking at dinner a little recklessly, realizing, as he did so, how easy it was to snatch fictitious pleasure from the very jaws of discontent. Since he was a fool, why should he not enjoy the fool's paradise?

Jack Kempton was done up as "Little Boy Blue," with a flaxen wig, the strands of which got into his mouth when he ate, and at last caught fire when he lit his cigarette. But Tony Lumpkin, in the person of Tommy McCall, put him out—almost literally—with a siphon bottle. De Chambord, jubilant and rather too

well groomed for François Villon, sipped his coffee abstractedly, while he committed to memory in English, the lines beginning, "Where are the girls of yesterday?" etc., to which he had invented a reply for the occasion. "Winnie" Townsend showed a well-turned calf as Orlando, and De Witt was still recognizable under the leather jerkin of Myles Standish. Two other men, who had come down for the week-end, Welby-King and "Freddy" Vaughan, were Bob Acres and John Ridd. Their host was Robin Hood.

Word was sent downstairs that the men must leave first, so they all got into one automobile and, chaffing one another good-naturedly, tripping over staves, swords, and domino-skirts, were off in the direction of the glow of red lights, which were now plainly visible, at the other side of the harbor.

"Gerry's spreading himself," said Tommy McCall. "Looks like Luna Park, doesn't it? Give me a cigarette, somebody. These dinky riding togs are going to be hot as the devil. I'm going as Adam—*au naturel*—next time."

"There won't be any next—not for me," growled De Witt. "This belt has stopped my circulation. Do you know, a fellow subject to periodical nervous depression can't have any——"

But Kempton headed him. "Loosen it, then, old chap. A periodical without a circulation is a subject for the coroner." And everybody laughed, not so much at the quality of the joke as at the discomfiture of Dudley De Witt, who had long since discovered that healthy stomachs nourished malignant dispositions.

The gateway to Long Point was in a blaze of light, and at the end of the avenue of maples, the Garriott car swung around the driveway into the line of arriving machines, which drew up at the porte-cochère to discharge their occupants, who in outer wraps, hurried indoors to the dressing rooms, anxious to begin the revel, echoes of which they could hear in the laughter of earlier arrivals, and in the cadences of the orchestra on the terrace, which had swung into a lively two-step. As Garriott's party went up the stairway, unmasked, they had to run the gauntlet of a descending throng of masquers, who spared neither friend nor foe. Garriott saw two figures—one a Friar, the other a Spanish gypsy—put their heads together as he passed. One of them whispered something to the other, and then they both laughed. It was not pleasant laughter, and Garriott remembered that somewhere he had heard the voice before. But there was pleasant laughter, too, and a pair of merry eyes smiled at him from their silken coverings, so that when he followed the crowd presently, and greeted his hostess, the carnival spirit possessed him, and he remembered only that he was Robin Hood, and would take his toll of gayety as he could. He followed Jack Kempton out to the terrace a little awkwardly, conscious of his Lincoln-green legs, looking around for a familiar figure. The terrace had been floored, and the waxed surface was full of moving figures. Electric bulbs, cunningly hidden, in varicolored Japanese lanterns, amid the palms and shrubbery, shed a gentle effulgence over the moving figures, warmly blending the costumes into a voluptuous har-

mony of soft color, which took the lights of a fire-opal as the figures emerged from shadow and caught the ruddy glow of the transparencies. It was like a scene from some pleasantly tangible fairy tale. In the interlude before the dance, the orchestra played the Mendelssohn overture to the "Midsummer Night's Dream," and it required but a slight trick of the imagination to conjure from the vagrant shadows of the trees the figures of Oberon, Titania, Puck, and all their gossamer train. And yet Garriott could not disregard the sound of the ass's bray in the music, and it reminded him—unpleasantly—that he, at least, was not a sprite. But when the dancing began again, he cast about for a partner. He would have given something to know what costume his wife was wearing, for they had all kept up the mystery until the end. While he stood by the door, peering at the new arrivals, there was a voice at his elbow, and an amiable person, with the crook and furbelows of Bo-Peep, stood smiling and curtesying.

"Hasn't she come, Robin Hood?" said a voice. "What a pity! Won't I do?"

"That's very fine of you, Bo-Peep. If you're shepherding, I'm really your lost lamb. Will you dance?"

"I didn't know lambs danced."

"They gambol. Let's gambol, then, out there on the green."

"I don't approve of gambolling."

"Even with a lamb?"

Her eyes, through their tiny slits, seemed to be searching him keenly, but he knew that she was mistaking him for someone else. She disguised her voice

so cleverly that he could not guess who she was. The dimness of the lights shrouded their meeting in so pleasant a kind of mystery, that the game was well worth pursuing.

"If you were only a lamb, Robin Hood, perhaps I might. But you're a sheep—a black one—at least, everybody tells me so."

"Now, I'm sure you're mistaken, Bo-Peep. I'm somebody else," he protested.

"Oh, no. I know who you are."

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Kempton—in the dressing room."

This was coming to earth with a vengeance. He started back in surprise, but hid his discomfiture. There was some mischief brewing here, and there was nothing left but to enter into it gayly.

"Mrs. Kempton! That was unfair. It puts me at a disadvantage."

She leaned forward, touched him lightly on the arm, and whispered softly: "Don't worry. You know, I—I rather like black sheep."

They were standing on the steps of the terrace which led to the winter garden. He pointed out into the darkness.

"That is the place for lost sheep. Won't you go with me there?"

"And leave my other ninety and nine?" she laughed. She sank on the step and motioned him to a place at her feet. She was a very wise and interesting person. Perhaps numbers made safety for them both.

"Well, then, tell me who you are."

"Don't you know? Haven't you guessed?"

"No," he said. "I haven't a notion. Who are you?"

"I? Oh, I'm the ghost of youth—the shepherdess of memories—memories of things that happened years ago, when you and I were little, and you were my 'Brushwood Boy.' Oh, years and years ago—before——"

She stopped and would not go on. Retrospection was out of place here, but something in the train of thought aroused a gallantry half gay, half sober.

"I'm still the 'Brushwood Boy'," he hazarded.

But she shook her head in mock seriousness. "No, no. There is no 'Brushwood Boy,' there never was. You're only what is left of the little male animal who used to carry my books from school—but the little animal has grown big, Réné, so big that he has forgotten me a little."

She had ceased to disguise her voice, and he know now that she was Natalie. That he could have been so easily deceived showed him how little he really knew her. He concealed the start of surprise, the pang of dismay at the revelation by rising to excuse himself. It would have been easy to learn more, if he wished, but it was only fair that she should know at once that he was not Réné De Land.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he said in a suppressed voice. "My name isn't Réné. It doesn't much matter what it is. I'm sorry. Won't you let me take you in?"

He could see that she was looking up at him incredulously, still unable to understand the pretty deception

of which she had been the victim, but she rose quickly and hid her discomfiture in a gay laugh.

"I've already been taken in, it seems. Good-by, Robin——" She stopped, the laugh dying on her lips, transfixed, as the truth at last came to her, and he felt the flash of her eyes through the slits in her mask, as her voice whispered chokingly:

"You—you're Brooke Garriott."

He bowed and turned away into the throng, leaving her there staring after him.

Of course, he had needed no confirmation of his wife's relations with De Land, and so he came out of the encounter no worse, if no better, than he had gone into it. But it puzzled him that Abby Kempton should have been the cause of the mischief. He had offended her somehow, out there in the boat, for he had felt it in her manner when they had met again. As a joke, the meeting had proved more expensive to his wife than to him, but it didn't seem quite fair of Mrs. Kempton, and behind the spirit of amusement he thought he discerned a less innocent motive. He knew that his wife was willing to believe the worst of him—even to credit him with being a party to the plot to serve his own ends. That didn't make a great deal of difference now, since further misunderstanding made no perceptible difference in the wide breach between them. And yet it seemed impossible that Mrs. Kempton could be so unfriendly to Natalie. He didn't know what to think. He seemed to have reached the point of utter insensibility. He had unconsciously girded it on as an armor against the weapons of his wife, and he was

grateful now that it enabled him to throw himself into the evening's gayety with an appearance of unconcern.

What surprised him most, was that he was not angry at the mischief-maker. He couldn't remember ever being really angry with Mrs. Kempton, though more than once she had provided him with a cause, and he found himself seeking her with a renewed sense of exhilaration. She was, after all, the only link that bound him here, and he could forgive much in one who had forged a tie which seemed so strong. But she saved him a search.

"How now, Robin?" cried a voice. "Have you lost your last friend?"

"I think so," he laughed, "unless you are she. Who *are* you?"

The figure courtesied prettily. "I'm 'Sally-in-our-Alley,' Robin. Will you walk?"

"Or dance? What do you say?"

In a moment they were gliding along with the others under the smiling stars. His partner danced like a sylph, and he yielded to the soft persuasion of the scene, the odor of roses, the balmy night, and the sensuous rhythm of the waltz. The hand he held in his was very soft, gloved only in white silk mittens, and he was a little pleased to discover on a certain finger a cabochon emerald, with which he was familiar.

"You've made a lot of trouble, 'Sally-in-our-Alley'," he said.

She affected surprise.

"My wife thought I was De Land," he continued. "*I* thought—I suppose I thought I'd made a conquest.

It seems I hadn't. Natalie talked too much. It was cruel of you."

She was laughing softly over his shoulder. "And you played a cross-ruff with Dummy?"

"Unconsciously—when I learned who she was, I left her. I knew enough already. Why did you do it?"

"Because I pleased," she defied him. "I'm not sorry. She is making a fool of herself."

"You've chosen a poor way to convince her of the fact, and she'll resent it. I would be better pleased if you would still remain her friend."

She stopped dancing, and led her companion to the balustrade at the end of the terrace.

"I think I am her friend," she said slowly.

"I'll be surprised if she forgives you. Would you like to confess your frailties to the ear of your——"

"To my outraged husband?" she laughed. "Jack is deaf, dumb and blind. Life wouldn't be possible under any other conditions. Besides, I have no lover. Lovers are much worse than husbands, they say. I've always avoided them—far more jealous and difficult to manage. Why, Tommy is even jealous of poor Dudley, and it sometimes makes Nina very unhappy wondering how to get along. Perhaps if I could find one who had been well brought up."

"What nonsense you talk."

"I've really thought very seriously about it," she said in an aggrieved tone. "You mustn't scoff at our philosophy."

She followed the direction of his gaze to where Bo-Peep, under the shadow of some palms, near the ter-

race steps, was talking to a Friar. Her head was close to his as he bent over her, listening intently. Had he been her Father Confessor, their attitude could not have been more suggestive. While Garriott and his companion watched, Bo-Peep and the Friar went down the steps and disappeared in the darkness.

"Seeking consolation in the Church," smiled Mrs. Kempton. "Confession, they say, is good for the soul."

"For whose soul? His or hers?"

She shrugged indifferently. "That is no longer my affair. I have done all I can, and I have only my labor for my pains. I'll meddle no more. I give you both up."

"Me?" he asked.

"Yes—you, too."

"You can't mean it. What have I done?"

"Nothing. That's precisely the trouble. You're impeccable. I'm dreadfully disappointed in you. It isn't possible for a mere human being like me to feel entirely at home with a phœnix. If I could only discover some trait that would identify you with the rest of us, some innocent moral infirmity, I might still have some hope for you and for Natalie. As it is, I can hardly blame her for her indifference. You may commit almost any crime in the social calendar, my friend, and still be received here, but there is one thing we women never entirely condone in a man. He may build a bridge, command an army, or govern a city, but if he fails in love, he's a failure in everything,

an object of commiseration, a marked man for the rest of his days."

The tone of her voice was still frivolous and playful, and below her mask her lips were smiling, but there was a cruelty in her words, which made him look at her again, to be sure he had heard correctly.

"It is true, Brooke Garriott, you are a failure," she repeated. But he still stared at her, unable to understand the cause for the whim, which had turned her against him. He was grieved and bitterly hurt.

"I was no different when I first met you," he said, "no less a failure then than now. Why did you interest yourself in me then?"

"It was a mistake," she confessed. "I'm sorry. It has taught me a lesson. Matches are only made in heaven."

"And so are friendships," he muttered. "You're sorry for that, too?"

"Oh, no," she said lightly. "But it was too sudden to be durable. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not too dull to take your hint. I won't trouble you again."

He was leaning against the balustrade beside her, looking out into the darkness. There was a dignity in his quiet acceptance of his dismissal. Before this he had always explained away their misunderstandings by the difference in their social training, and trusted to primitive instincts which they shared in common, to set matters right, but this time there seemed no hope of a reconciliation on either side. She had sought out

his wound and made it the goal of her daintiest barb. He remembered now her tremors for the fate of their friendship, her jibes at Vulcan, her amusement at his sentiment, and he realized how shallow had been her pretenses to sympathy.

But just then the hand on the railing closed over his, and soft fingers were twining among his own, and when he turned in quick surprise, he found her face very close to his. He could not see her eyes, but he guessed that, were they not hidden from him, he would have seen there the look he had discovered before, when real sympathy and understanding had struggled for expression. Her voice, too, was very tender again.

"Did you lose faith in me just then, Robin Hood?"

"I did. I think I almost lost faith in everything. Why are you so cruel?"

"I don't know. I think I'm always cruellest to the people I care for." She withdrew her hand. "You mustn't question me. You'll have to take me as I am."

"I'll do what you like, if you'll promise not to give me up."

"Come," she said suavely, "let's dance again."

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUEST OF VULCAN

ALREADY were the signs of exhilaration in many of Mrs. Schuyler's guests, and the cause was readily apparent. Marquees had been erected here and there in the open, where refreshment was dispensed with a liberality which did better credit to Gerry Schuyler's munificence than to his judgment. But Gerry had discovered that, no matter how well a function might be devised, it was possible to mar its effect by too discriminate a hospitality, and stupid occasions, he had often noted, had, by a like provision, been made reasonably bearable. It was not for him to take the burden of other peoples' frailties on his shoulders. He had troubles enough of his own, and the children of the younger set, who had not cut their stomach teeth were better back in the nursery.

Garriott met Dudley De Witt, stumbling over his rapier, at one of the refreshment tables. Brooke hadn't found it possible to establish himself on intimate terms with his guest, and his own stomach was far too reliable to permit him to understand the vagaries of the hypochrondiac, but somehow, to-night, there seemed a bond of sympathy between them.

"Hello, Garriott! You alone, too? Beastly affair,

this. What's the use of all this rubbish. Can't avoid your enemies—can't find your friends. All damn nonsense! Why can't people stay at home and play bridge like Christians? Why, I don't even know Nina. Seen her anywhere, Garriott?"

"Yes, I danced with her a while ago."

"Oh!" eagerly, "you know her costume?"

Garriott puzzled a moment. "No, I can't say I do. She had on a yellow wig and some sort of a puffy kind of thing. They all look alike to me, De Witt." He might have made an exception or two, but that was his affair, and poor De Witt's matrimonial troubles didn't keenly interest him. When he had last seen Nina De Witt she was disappearing into the shadows of the garden with Tony Lumpkin. But the crestfallen look of his companion made him wish that he could give him pleasanter information.

"That's it," growled Dudley, "you're all in the conspiracy. They're all wearing 'puffy' things. That doesn't help me much." Then, irritably: "Have a drink?"

They toasted each other in silence, the older man unconsciously presenting to Garriott a portent of what the future might hold in store for him. It was so easy—so easy—to drift carelessly down-stream on the Boetian tide. This man, they told him, had once been reckoned successful. The parallel was deadly enough as it was—Garriott's wife, too, was in the garden.

With an abrupt gesture he drank, and set his glass down on the table. "Come, De Witt," he said with a show of gayety, "this is no place for you. Beauty

is waiting on the terrace." He led him out and up the lawn. "Besides, you'll be feeling like the devil to-morrow."

"I'm feeling like the devil now," whined De Witt. "Hello, what's up?"

A herald, gorgeously dressed in a costume of Old England, had blown a dozen blasts on his long trumpet, and was announcing the beginning of the rustic dances. Around them was the sound of voices as the figures of the masqueraders, silvered over with the moonlight, emerged in groups from the obscurity of the trees and gardens, where they had wandered in the intermission, and now converged upon the terrace. Garriott ruthlessly left his companion, and plunged into the thick of the throng, finding himself presently on amiable terms with a graceful person with a trim waist, slender ankles, and a brogue, who announced that she was Kitty of Coleraine. By couples they danced the length of the floor and back again, to the music of "Dancing in the Barn." Gerry Schuyler, as "Pan," led the figure, his stooping shoulders and bowed legs more noticeable than ever in his curious costume. His partner was "Florrie" Vanuxem, who, as Diana, reached, if she did not pass, the limit of decorous drapery. But she was graceful and knew it, and the antics of her droll partner only served to throw her own comeliness into higher relief. Orlando and Maid Marian, Little Boy Blue and Charlotte Corday, Tony Lumpkin and Lorna Doone, Myles Standish and Priscilla, Bob Acres and a Quakeress, Friar Tuck and Rosalind, and all the others, followed in their turn, each couple vying with

those who had gone before in the originality of their burlesque. And when they all swung into the two-step that followed, their laughter still echoed above the gay measures of the orchestra.

A tarantella by members of the younger set, previously rehearsed, came after. Eight debutantes with reputations (and matches) to make, danced with their squires, while Neapolitan singers and red lights contributed to an effect so sumptuous that the dance was repeated amid applause. There followed a Morris Dance, which was no more than a mad scamper with bells and hobby-horses, the dancers, older people this time, taking all the license their masque allowed them. The carnival spirit was rife, and Garriott, too, had fallen under the spell of Mrs. Schuyler's gay harlequinade. Garriott's partners flirted outrageously, and though he had ceased to care who they were, they drove his own thoughts to cover and restored his lost youth. At a signal, four May poles were erected, and the guests divided into groups. Vari-colored ribbons were handed out by the costumed pages, and in the hunt for positions which followed, Garriott was swept into the maze. It was a time-honored figure, but the old English music gave it a new flavor, and as the dancers unwove the silken strands, he passed one by one the now familiar figures of the women of his own party, who seemed to have been gathered in one group. As the ribbons reached the top of the poles they shook loose and fell to the floor, and at the same time the signal was given to unmask. The ribbons, unwound,

made eight sets of reins of different colors, and around the dancers circled, a girl driving two men, a man driving two girls.

No one knew whether the distribution of the colors had been made by accident or by design, but at each May-pole there was at least one divorcée driving two husbands. And what happened in Garriott's set was sufficiently amusing. Mrs. Vanuxem, with the red ribbons, had Percy and Welby-King; Mrs. Wetherall, with the blue, had DeCourcey Wetherall and Gilbert Darrow; Mrs. Vaughan, with the yellow, had "Freddy" and Warren Sears; and Natalie, with the green, had Brooke Garriott and Réné De Land. Garriott took the situation good humoredly. Indeed, there seemed no other way to take it. His wife had other views, for when she discovered her husband she turned her back on him squarely and took the arm of De Land. "Come, Réné," she said, "I'm tired of dancing."

He knew that it was her reply to his indictment of her admirer, and he heard the voice of De Land laughing at the incident as he bore her away. They were on a different footing here. Garriott felt that the eyes of the whole party were upon him, and he was vaguely uncomfortable, but as he turned aside, Mrs. Kempton, who had seen the incident, greeted him gayly.

"Deserted? So am I. Jack went off with Bertha Paget. We must console ourselves. Supper is ready, and I'm famished."

He offered her his arm, and permitted her to lead him off, and they found a small table in the conserva-

tory. He understood her better now, and the old relation was resumed from the point where it had been broken.

"It's a funny world, isn't it, Brooke Garriott?" she said. "Half of the people in it are trying to get married—the other half trying to get divorced. I wonder if anybody is satisfied."

"You are, aren't you?"

"I?" she laughed. "Do I seem so? I'm glad I make that impression. It's the effort of my life to conceal my secret sorrows."

"I didn't know you had any sorrows," he said in surprise.

"I have—a hundred of them. I'm a year older than I was last year, for one, and this season's hats are atrocious—that's another."

She seemed surprised when he laughed at her.

"Two sorrows—and what are the other ninety-eight?"

She did not reply at once. When she did, her mood had changed.

"Jack is the other ninety-eight," she said.

"Your husband! Why, Jack is——"

But she cut him short with a wave of the hand. "We won't talk about Jack. He's no better and no worse than most of the husbands of my friends." She stopped abruptly, and he could not question her further, though the nature of their intimacy seemed to give him the right. He had been ready to speak of other things, when she resumed.

"Oh, Jack and I get along—as others get along. He lets me beautifully alone, and I don't bother him. There was a time when it was different. But society seemed to demand things of us that we couldn't do together—demanded them with extinction as the alternative. Bridge, teas, and luncheons for me—his clubs, sports, and—and other things—for Jack. We never dined alone. It got so at last that I never saw my husband except at somebody's dinner table, in somebody's box at the opera, or at somebody's dance, and never had a chance to speak to him unless it was when we were driving home, too bored and too dead tired to think of anything but sleep. Oh, the House of Kempton has reached social eminences, but the climb has cost us something—both of us."

She gave a sharp little sigh, and Garriott wondered if the cost to Kempton hadn't been greater than the cost to her.

"The trouble was, that we got used to getting along without each other. When we might have dined at home alone and repaired damages, we ran from our thoughts and from each other, and sought a café and company. I wonder why? We were insane about each other when we married!"

She asked the question of no one in particular, querulously, like a person thinking aloud. Garriott forgot his own troubles in the revelation of the grim reality of hers. He was only a fool reaping the fruit of his own folly. Her tragedy was grown from the seed of happiness.

"And now?" he asked.

She gave him a quick glance, and turned away with a laugh.

"We're no longer insane, that's all," she said carelessly; and then, suddenly: "Oh, don't think I'm unhappy. I take as much delight in everything as I once did, only it's a different kind of delight. No one has a better time than I, and Jack gets me everything in the world I want. What more can any woman ask? He'd give me a divorce in a minute if I asked him to—I mean if I wanted to marry anybody. He'd hate to have me go, of course, and he wouldn't let me marry a man of whom he didn't entirely approve. We're good pals, after all, and he's awfully fond of me." She broke off angrily. "Why is it you make me talk of serious things? You're a part of something in me that seems to have been put there ages ago to echo, whether I want it to or not. I don't like it. I hate to be serious. Other men like you are priggish. I wonder why you're not. I think you are, a little. You think so much of your troubles. This world is full of your kind of tragedies—I could tell you a dozen." She held out her glass for champagne, and he filled it while she mocked at him. "Eat and drink, my friend. The only tragedy that could happen here would be to have Gerry's terrapin get cold," then raised the glass to her lips and pledged him. "Vulcan of the forge, on his quest for kisses!" He flushed darkly, but met her look. Was it a challenge, or a taunt?

He was saved a reply by the appearance of Mrs.

De Witt and Tommy McCall, who dropped into the vacant chairs.

"Sorry, Garriott, Abby—not a table left. Any manna for starving people? What is it? Turtle? Glad I came. We're parched," he explained.

"Have you seen Dudley?" laughed Abby. "He thought I was Nina for a while. Where on earth have you been?"

"Down by the sad sea waves," said Tommy sentimentally.

"Where is he now?" sighed Mrs. De Witt. "Poor Dudley!" She was the woman of thirty, elusive, dangerous, her beauty a little marred by a sulky and petulant expression of the eyes, belied by the silken tones of her voice and the sudden caress of her smile. "It was a pity he bothered you, Abby. What did you do?"

"I called him Tommy, and made love to him," said Abby mischievously. "I fancy that didn't make him any happier. Finally he took off his mask furiously and showed me who he was, but I knew it all the time."

"And did he know you?"

"No. That's why I'm in hiding. But he'll hardly find me where *you* are," she finished.

And they all laughed as they echoed, "Poor Dudley!"

But at this moment, De Witt, still struggling with his sword, made a sudden appearance.

"Here you are," he growled. "Where the devil have you been, Nina?"

At the sound of his voice she turned in mild surprise, and flashed her brightest smile at him.

"Why, Dudley dear! Tom and I have been hunting *everywhere* for you. It was so stupid of you not to let me know. I actually was beginning to believe you had gone home. I've been very angry with you, Dudley. Are you feeling badly?"

As she asked the question she laid her hand gently on his arm, and sought his face with her silken smile. "You haven't had an attack?" she whispered anxiously. "Are you feeling better now? Loosen your waistband. Do sit down and eat something."

"Have a drink, Dudley? It's a vintage, old man," said McCall.

De Witt glared, sat, then took the drink poured for him. "Poison," he grumbled, but drank it.

Garriott was already familiar with the plot of this comedy, phases of which had been developed at "The Grange," but as neither he nor Mrs. Kempton were in the cast, they got up. As she rose, Garriott's companion paused beside De Witt.

"Are you cross, Dudley?"

But he wouldn't reply.

"I'll tell Nina."

"What?" he said blankly.

"That you made love to me, thinking I was some one else."

"Oh, I say, Abby, you know who I thought you were."

"I wasn't the one, Dudley; that's all I know. It disappointed me frightfully."

But Mrs. De Witt was generous enough or keen enough to ignore her opportunity, and refused to join in the amusement which followed, and when Garriott turned for a final glance he could see that the burden of proof rested on the shoulders of poor De Witt.

They had wandered out of doors before Garriott spoke. "I've seen birds do that," he said, half to himself. "I suppose it's some instinct inherited from a common protoplasm."

"Do what?" she asked.

"Ignore or attack their sick and dying. Why do we all victimize a man when he's down?"

Her laugh was delicately cruel. Her sympathies were all on the side of the woman.

"No man should be in a position to be victimized," she said briefly.

They had reached the shadows where the trees met the lawn, and followed the gravel walk down a gentle declivity to the shore.

"You're right," he said at last, with a deep positiveness that startled her. "I've learned something here. Let the devil take the hindmost—that's your philosophy. Nobody else will. I owe something to De Witt. He's a kind of horrible example to me. But I'll die with my boots on," he boasted. "I'll run the house of Garriott my own way, or the house of Garriott will fall."

His boyishness amused her, but she felt the force behind the braggadocio, and swept the ground with a low courtesy.

"*Vive le Roi*," she said.

She was in the satirical mood which so well became her, and which he so little understood. It seemed impossible to resist putting it on when Garriott assumed that air, for she was called upon to stand up for the traditions of the women of her set and class. She seemed to know by intuition that this was her strongest weapon—one that always put him on the defensive.

"Do you think," she went on scornfully, "that a woman like Natalie is such dull metal that you can forge her on your anvil, Vulcan? Would you cut a gem with a cold-chisel, or restore a Tanagra with a trowel?"

"I'll use whatever implements I have at hand," he muttered.

She examined him a moment, then threw up her hands in mock dismay.

"There was a time when I had hopes for you. I have tried at least to bring you up the way you should go, but you're all alike—once in trousers, you begin to strut—and after that you're hopeless."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Dissemble. If you insist on playing the lion, do it under the ass's skin."

"That wouldn't be difficult."

"I don't know," doubtfully. "It takes a clever lion to be an ass."

"I'm willing to try," he laughed.

"Then begin at once."

"How?"

"By making love to me."

"In which capacity?"

"I might tell you that later." She fenced admirably. He was no match for her at this kind of dialogue, but he ventured:

"It seems that this is a case where I'd rather be a lion."

"Even if I preferred you in the other character. There was a lady once——"

She stopped. "Well, why don't you begin?"

"I think I began when I first saw you."

"Bravo! You're improving. But you're not precipitate enough. There never was such a luke-warm lover. Now you must take my hand and lead me to this bench. There—as you were saying——"

The skill of her parry, the subtlety of her attack, her glittering transitions, bewildered him, and he sank beside her, laughing ruefully at his own incapacity in this unequal game, the arts of which she used with such appalling familiarity.

"You incorrigible coquette!" he murmured. "Doesn't your conscience trouble you at all?"

"I thought I told you I had no conscience."

The light from the swinging transparencies danced about them, frolicking among the shadows, flickering on her face, playing at hide and seek in her hair, then vanishing and taking her with it—all but the very tangible fingers which he still held in his. As she finished speaking she laughed again provokingly, and he saw that the witchery of the night had been caught in the eyes now very close to his.

"Nor have I—to-night," he whispered. "What are you, Abby? A sprite, a Sybil or—just a woman?

What kind of magic have you used? There is nothing in the world to-night but this garden and you."

"There are other things," she reproved him.

"They are not for me. It was you who made me a puppet at the beginning, and you've had a lot of fun watching the game. But I'm not going to play the puppet any longer. I think you've tried me too hard. It is a dangerous night. Even a wooden image might fall."

She withdrew her hand and moved away a little, but her humor was still undaunted.

"And to-morrow?"

"There's no to-morrow. There's no yesterday, there's only now. You've given it to me——"

"I?"

"Yes." He took her in his arms and kissed her bunglingly. She put down her head quickly, so that he only touched her brow, and so with an effort she flung away from him and escaped.

"Vulcan on his quest for kisses!" she cried derisively. "You're a rough wooer. Love isn't a battle, Vulcan."

"Forgive me," contritely.

"I don't know." This from the shelter of a bush beside the path. "You've ruffled my feelings and my frock."

"I promise you——"

"What?"

"That I'll not do it again."

Her voice echoed mockingly among the sober branches.

"Oh, Vulcan!"

"You're laughing at me."

"So are the stars. Who wouldn't? Was there ever such a bear-like kiss? I'm black and blue." Then her merriment began again. "You won't do it again? I hope not—at least, *not like that.*" And she was off like a shot through the bushes.

"You witch!" he cried, starting after her. But she had vanished in the shrubbery, and when he emerged on the other side he could just see her slender figure coursing down the hill, where a strip of lawn had been laid through the trees. She was fleet as the wind, and when she neared the beach below them she sought cover again, then doubled on her course like a hare, and flew up the hill. But he was faster, and as she tired he was close on her heels. He reached her as she ran into the summer house on Long Point.

"I have you now," he panted, and caught her in his arms. This time, blown and utterly weary, she yielded and lay unresisting over his arm, while he kissed her as he pleased. If there was cause for complaint as to the manner in which he did it, he gave her no chance to tell.

"You'll mock at Vulcan, will you? You'll mock no more. His quest of kisses is ended—here . . . here, Abby. . . . and here. . . . Vulcan seeks no farther, do you understand? . . . Are you glad or sorry? Answer me. . . . Did you wish it so, or were you only tantalizing me? . . . At least, you're human—warm with blood. . . . I've found your heart—I feel it now

—it's fluttering here with mine. I love you, Abby. . . open your eyes, and say you're not angry, dear. Won't you?"

She opened her eyes, but not to his. He saw them stare across the dimly-lighted pavilion, and followed her gaze to where two people in the costumes of Bo-Peep and a Friar had risen from the stone bench and were looking at them. Abby Kempton started out of his arms, and he let her go—to face his wife and De Land, who had been silent witnesses of the end of Vulcan's quest.

He heard Natalie's voice, crystal-clear, as she took the arm of her escort.

"It was too bad of us to intrude. Réné, will you take me back?"

CHAPTER XV

THE VISITOR

OVER on the East Side, about halfway uptown, in a fastness of cheap tenements, lodging-houses, and small factories, Garriott had established a workshop. It was a huge, barn-like structure of brick, which, in its long career, had been the home of various unsuccessful enterprises—a market, a school, a prize-ring, and a boiler factory—but Brooke had fallen in love with it at sight, for it was exactly what he wanted for his work, and without difficulty he had concluded a satisfactory lease with the agents of the owners, who were glad of an opportunity to get enough to pay its taxes. So Garriott made extensive alterations and moved in. At one side of the wide portal was a small brass sign:

B. Garriott,
Motor Trucks.

The large interior of the building fulfilled every promise of gloominess which the outside had indicated. The ceiling-rafters, brick walls, and iron uprights had long ago been whitewashed, but the stains of dust, smoke, and grime had obliterated these signs of early

renovation. In one corner was a dismantled boiler, in another a pile of scrap and pig iron; near one window ran a bench, and at one side some tools, a lathe, and a drill-press operated by power hired from the factory adjoining. In the middle of the brick floor was a huge truck, a brewery-wagon, in which the Garriott engine had been installed, its dusky outlines lost in the pall of smoke from the forge, where a grimy giant was busy tempering some tools. There was a hum of wheels, a clatter of connecting gear, a complaining rasp of metal against metal, and from the pattern-shop at the rear a noise of planing and sawing—to an outsider bedlam—but to Garriott's ear the orderly collaboration of all the parts of a well-oiled piece of machinery. A flight of stairs at one corner led to a loft, drafting-room, and office. The floor of the loft was covered with a litter of wooden patterns and miscellaneous iron and copper pieces. It looked like an overflow from a junk shop, but to Garriott each piece of wood or metal had an identity, a personality, and a history; here, the water regulator, which had caused him so many sleepless nights; there, parts of a ventilating outfit, gear-wheels of various sizes, bits of copper tubing, burners, and parts of machinery, each representing a certain phase of his career to the success which now seemed so very near at hand.

The germ of a Great Idea had come to Garriott before he had left college, and when he went West to the shop he carried in a precious tin cylinder the drawings from which his first model was made. Of course, the first engine was a failure. So was the second. But he wasn't

the kind of fellow to give up. He knew he had a good thing if he ever could work it out. An engine that would concentrate power in small space and weight was a commercial possibility—more than that, a commercial necessity. Even in those days he could see far enough ahead to realize that it would be many years before the electric storage battery as a motive power for heavy vehicles would be a success. Some years had passed since then, and electricity where a trolley was prohibited was still to prove its efficiency.

Garriott had permitted nothing to divert him from his main idea, and he carried on the work in spite of many obstacles. Out West he got permission of the superintendent of motive power to work in the railroad shops after the plant had closed down for the night. Of course, he had no power, but he rigged up a crank on the spindle of a lathe, one on the pulley of a drill press, and another on a shaper, and worked the tools himself by hand as he needed them. It was trying work, sweating there alone in the gas-light when the other fellows were out dining or going to dances. But he kept at it for three years, and at last his efforts were crowned with success. He had evolved a sixty-horse-power engine, small and compact, which weighed only three hundred pounds, and the same power in any successful electric motor meant a weight of over two thousand. The last engine which had been built before Garriott came to New York had been shipped to the shop. This was the engine which all the past week had been running the big brewery wagon, loaded with pig iron, through the city and suburbs on all kinds of

grades. The generator was his own, too. Instead of gasoline, which would have been expensive, he used kerosene, a thirty per cent. by-product, and his figures were amazing. He could run his truck at a cent a mile, and he figured that he could run a street car of the new type under four cents—less than the cost of a trolley.

Garriott was sitting at his desk poring over some drawings, listening to a thickly-set dark man with a blue jowl and protruding eyebrows, following the black, stubby finger of his machinist as it traced the lines and figures under discussion. This was O'Dowd, and they were fighting again the old battle of theory versus practice. O'Dowd, as he himself well knew, was there as a check on Garriott's enthusiasm, and he did his part of the work with a rugged directness to which they were both accustomed. But to-day Garriott listened to his arguments with an air of abstraction, and O'Dowd, finding that nothing he said could arouse the inventor to the rough word-battle they both loved, at last gave up with a parting shot, which brought no reply, and went downstairs.

After O'Dowd went out Garriott waited a moment, then got up and closed the door. He opened the drawer of his desk and took out a letter which had come in the late afternoon mail, the reading of which the man had prevented. He tore the envelope hurriedly and read:

"RHEINBECK.

"A kiss, dear Brooke, is such a tiny thing to have

caused such a commotion, but it really seems as though it is the tiny things in life which make the most trouble. Kissing is one of the sweet civilities of this world, but, after all, it is only skin-deep. I suppose any other persons but you and I might pass their time in this agreeable occupation without the least danger of detection. But Fate, rejoicing in our enjoyment, arranged an audience so that others might share in her delight.

"Natalie and Réné, of all people! I've never felt so small since I was born—the pretty climax of our little comedy so terribly spoiled.

"Oh, I'm not in the least ashamed of myself. I'm never ashamed of anything I do! But then, I never do anything of which I can be ashamed. That sounds Irish, doesn't it? But then, you know what I mean. I suppose I'm to blame. I usually am, and I haven't any intention of escaping my share of responsibility. I led you on. You threatened me—some time. I wanted to see if you would. I know now.

"The leather apron of Vulcan has gone to make a new quiver for Cupid.

"But the transformation was so strange. I'm not really sure that I know you even now, for if you have removed some old doubts, I'm afraid you have created new ones. It is curious, too, that I can't seem to feel any sympathy for myself, for you, or for Natalie. The only person who seems to have worried me is Réné De Land. You've provided him with such a trenchant weapon. I don't think I can ever look him in the face

again. If I have any regrets on your account, they are locked in my heart of hearts, and are of no interest to any one in the world but me.

"It would be foolish for either of us to try to disguise the exact nature of our sentimental relations. If circumstance has thrown us together and made you more or less dependent upon me, it does not blind me to the fact that you are more in love with Natalie than ever. That is true, my friend. I suppose that, after those few mad moments in the pavilion, you might be tempted to salve my feelings by denying it. Don't bother. Women have been kissed before, and have lived to tell the story. I fancy I shall. Though there won't be much need of *my* telling it now, since in some way the pretty gossip is in circulation. It must have been De Land, for, of course, Natalie would remain silent. I suppose it was too good to keep. Even poor Jack is perturbed. He has been quite exciting. When I left 'The Grange' I came to our place here. Jack followed. He's as sullen as a dog with a bone. He has been asking me vague questions, which I answer as vaguely. I fancy he's somewhat chastened. I don't know why, and I don't care why. I don't seem to care about anything. I must be tired, so I think I had better sleep.

"Good night, Vulcan—that slipped from my pen. Perhaps it's as Vulcan I like you best, though Vulcan *did* win Venus after all, didn't he? Be good, my friend. When next you go questing kisses, choose a lonely mountain-top at the dark of the moon. A. K."

Garriott sat deep in his chair while he read and reread the pages. She had promised to write him when he left "The Grange" on the day that followed Mrs. Schuyler's party. The spirit of the letter was hers, and it refreshed him as though it had been a visit from herself, but the serious note that had often echoed in their relations appeared more insistently here. She felt her position keenly. He read that in every line. She had always been so ready with laughter at the caprices of her frivolous sisters that the revelation of her own frailty made the more delectable this morsel which had been thrown broadcast among her dear five hundred friends. In the week that had elapsed, Brooke had found himself wondering what his wife was thinking, but he realized that his deepest concern had been for the happiness of Abby Kempton. He would have given an arm to spare her further humiliation, and had thought of—and rejected—a hundred ways to accomplish that end. Natalie's feelings mattered less. There had been times when only her womanhood and his tolerance had protected her from sharp passages. The infant romance was dead for lack of nourishment. Mrs. Kempton had never been willing to believe that. He had sworn it, but she had only laughed at him. What was the instinct that had always put her on the defensive with him, even until the very moment when the chase was ended, she was in his arms, and the spell had been broken? On that night he had found a way past all her barriers.

The one thing that stood out most clearly in his

mind was his duty to Abby. Their "mad moment," as she had called it, had passed, and he saw her again as he had always seen her at "The Grange" and in town—whimsical and satirical by turns, mocking at the faults of others, and blessedly tolerant of his own. Her letter showed that she was still untamed, and, while her defense still availed against himself, it seemed as though all the rest of the world had been let into the secret of her folly. D—n them! Was there no way to stop their prattling tongues? He rose impatiently and walked to the window. He had made a pretty mess of things from the beginning, and he seemed to have an infinite capacity for bringing others in to bear the burdens of his mistakes. He had learned a lesson —at the cost of all hope of happiness. There were but two things left: to repair damages as best he might, and to work as he had never worked before.

He went down into the shop, took up some adjusting on the new car-truck, which he had been tinkering at during the forenoon, and was soon so engrossed that he forgot everything but the refractory bearing which had been giving trouble. Before long his hands were black with oil and steel filings, he had smudges of coal-dust and dirt across his face, down which the sweat poured in little rivulets, streaking the darkened skin with paler lines. He did not see the feminine figure which had hesitated in the doorway before the huge mass that loomed before her, and looked around, seeking some one of whom she might make inquiries. O'Dowd came forward from the obscurity and offered his serv-

ices. The sounds of the shop were stilled for a moment, and when Garriott looked up, O'Dowd had conducted their visitor to his side.

"A lady, Brooke," he said, and stood aside. Even then Garriott did not recognize her. The fog of work was in his eyes, and the frown of concentration still lingered on his brows. It was not until he got up and took off his battered hat that he recognized his wife. Even then, in her white serge and picture-hat, she seemed so strange a visitor in the grim setting of the smoky background that he stared in blank bewilderment, conscious of his grime and overalls, and aware of the sharp contrast in their conditions. She was, perhaps, the last person in the world he was expecting to see, and the assurance of her smile only deepened the mystery of her sudden appearance. He felt absurdly ill at ease, and it was only when her voice broke the silence that he was recalled to the necessities of the situation.

"You don't seem very glad to see me," she began. "Would it be possible to spare me a moment or so?"

He laughed a little uneasily. "Of course. Will you go to the office? I'll join you when I wash my face. Jim, will you show Mrs. Garriott up?"

In a moment he met her upstairs, closed the door of his office, and stood before her, his eyes questioning.

"I hope I haven't intruded——"

"Not at all," quietly. "It's nearly closing time. I'm going home at about five."

"Home! To 'The Grange'?"

"Oh, no; 'The Grange' isn't——" he paused. "I

meant to my boarding-house. It isn't far from here."

"Oh!"

She was silent a moment. "You are living at one of those gloomy boarding-houses! That's very stupid. Why don't you go to an hotel?"

"I want to be quiet. I have to be here pretty early."

She shrugged her shoulders, and the quick glance she threw around the room missed nothing—the wash-stand, the new safe, the rusty chairs and desk, which he had picked up at auction, his letter files, the water bottle in the corner, and his street clothes, which hung on a nail on the back of the door. Her lips pursed critically, but she said politely: "It seems you are already well established."

He made no reply. None was necessary. He was waiting, curious as to the object of her visit, which he knew would soon be revealed. She *was* handsome. He watched her as she got up and moved lightly over to the window. Across the street was a row of dingy tenements, where soiled linen depended from the fire-escapes, and the open windows gave glimpses of squalid interiors, grimy children, and unkempt mothers. There was a smell of onions and frying grease, and the squall of numberless infants.

"Ugh!" she shuddered, shrinking back into the room. "How I hate ugliness! Must you sit here and look at that all day?"

"I don't look when I can help it," he explained. "Sometimes I must, of course. But then, ugliness has its uses. It makes contrast. Beautiful things are not

"She was, perhaps, the last person in the world he was expecting to see."

nearly so beautiful if you haven't ugly things to compare them with. You can understand that, can't you?"

It was a new thought to her. She was not accustomed to look at anything that was not beautiful, and she regarded him curiously. He was not beautiful, either, for there were vestiges of soot upon his chin. But he found something encouraging in her interest in his neighbors, so he came over and stood beside her. "Do you see that window over there—the one with the nasturtium pot on the fire-escape? That is where the Salotti family lives. One child has double pneumonia and is going to die; another has a broken hip; the baby it not very well, and the mother is consumptive. To make things worse, the father was laid off when his contractor finished the last job, and he didn't work for a month."

"Why didn't he work?" she asked indignantly.

"It wasn't because he didn't want to," he finished dryly. "I've taken him in here with me now, and they're managing somehow."

"How dreadful! And are there other cases like this?"

"Yes. More than I care to hear about."

Her ignorance of the life amid which he worked was pathetic, and her eagerness brought to light a phase of her character, the existence of which he had once suspected, and it pleased him that his judgment, at least so far, had not been at fault, but the impersonal nature of their conversation deepened the mystery of her visit.

"Aren't you afraid of mingling with these people?" she continued. "You might take some contagion——"

"Oh, I'm far too healthy——" He paused. It seemed almost time to end the subterfuge. "Besides, if anything *did* happen to me, your troubles would be ended."

Her brow clouded, and she looked quickly away from him.

"That was unnecessary—unkind. I've never wished you that." She seemed to understand his object in bringing their thoughts to a focus. "I suppose you want to know why I'm here?"

"I never hoped to be so honored." But she cut him short with a gesture.

"Don't be ironical. We've begun rather well—for us. Don't let's spoil it."

He bowed his head. "But I can't believe you came here for the pleasure of my society. What can I do for you?"

She met his eyes a moment, then studied the pattern in the linoleum on the floor.

"Some days ago I had a letter from Mr. Northrop, in reply to one of my own about getting some money for the first payment on the *Alicia*, and, finding his letter unsatisfactory, I met him by appointment at his office to-day to talk the matter over. I have been with him most of the afternoon, and I don't think anything is clearer in my mind than it was yesterday. He took me to lunch at a depressingly respectable hotel, and talked to me with that fatherly air of his which so infuriates me. But I've kept my temper. The facts

seem to be these: We haven't nearly as much as I thought we had. When the firm bought Uncle Oliver's interests before he died—a year or more ago—almost all of the money was invested in the stock of the Clinton Trust Company, in which he was for many years a director. I've spent a good deal at 'The Grange,' and in order to keep my promises with the Penningtons, it will be necessary to borrow. As stocks are low, he strongly advised me against it. The gist of the matter is, that he has referred me to you. Hence——"

She paused and made a pretty gesture of apology, which was more eloquent than anything she might have said. But he knew her visit had cost her something.

"I know," he said slowly. "Northrop was here yesterday."

"And you agreed," she flashed at him, "that I was extravagant?"

"No," he returned. "I didn't agree with him as to anything. He did most of the talking. I haven't given him the benefit of my advice—nor shall I give it to you. If you'll remember, I attempted once before to advise you, and only got snubbed for my pains. You must use your own discretion in the matter."

She bit her lips. The rebuke was too well merited to be agreeable. She turned on him petulantly.

"It doesn't seem as though I had any discretion when your assent is required to every request that I make."

His voice fell a note. "You mustn't blame me for that. It isn't my fault. It's very humiliating to you, and it's very disagreeable to me; so disagreeable that

I've about decided to arrange matters differently. I don't intend to be placed in such a position any longer."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are to do as you like. We have fulfilled the conditions of the will, and, so far as I have been able to discover, there is nothing to prevent our using our principal, provided we both agree. You need more money. Very well. I agree to let you have it. Personally, I have no use for a yacht, but if you have committed yourself in some way, I suppose there is nothing left but to provide for it."

She glanced at him in a new kind of wonder. Mr. Northrop's attitude had led her to believe that a refusal on her husband's part was a possibility to be considered. He had even gone so far as to say he didn't see how any sane man could be willing to jeopardize a snug fortune in such a bad market, for a woman's whim. She had not until now fully realized the power he wielded over her destiny, and she tried to imagine a motive for his magnanimity.

"It—it is very kind of you," she found herself murmuring.

"Oh, not at all," he went on easily. "I've always felt that I hadn't much moral right to Oliver Judson's money—at least, not as much right as you have. You lived with him. To all intents you were his daughter, and he gave you every reason to expect a full inheritance. You were very badly treated, and I haven't ceased to regret my share in the business. I'd like to

do what I can to set things right, and it seems to me that the best way I can do that is to let you have what belongs to you."

She was smiling now—a little dubiously.

He had risen, and was walking up and down the room.

"Then you approve?" she asked.

He stopped abruptly and faced her.

"No; I didn't say that," he said rather sharply. "I merely said that I assented. I don't approve."

She flushed darkly, but with an effort controlled her temper, but there was a touch of haughtiness in the toss of her head and the compression of her lips. What was there for her to say? She could not argue such a question when he had already undermined her position by acceding to every request. She felt that any contention meant loss of dignity, and somewhere deep within her was a growing conviction that her husband was right. A man who, in a breath, was willing to give her a fortune in money to use as she wished could not be far wrong in anything. She searched his face, trying to find a motive for his extraordinary generosity, and he watched her with a politeness which was rendered somewhat grotesque by the traces of soot which still streaked his face.

"I can't understand you at all," she said at last. "But I'm sure I'm very grateful." She glanced around the room. "It doesn't seem fair, somehow, for me to have so much. I'm sure you can't be very comfortable here—or at the place where——"

"Oh, I'm all right," he said. "I can't work if things

are too easy. I suppose if I wanted a week-end in the country you would still let me come down to 'The Grange'."

"It is yours," she smiled, "as much as mine. I hope you'll come when you can. I needn't bother you much. I shall be away most of the summer, but Tibbott is there, and Bradley——" She stopped suddenly. "Why don't you have Tibbott in town to look after you?"

"Oh, God forbid!" he said with a heartfelt solemnity. His wife looked at him a moment, then fell back in her chair and laughed until the tears came into her eyes.

"I don't think I shall need Tibbott," he concluded amicably.

In a moment she rose and offered her hand. He wiped his own on his overalls, then looked at it ruefully.

"You'll have to take the will for the deed," he laughed. "I'm not in the habit of receiving visitors."

As she turned to the door, her eyes glanced at the desk, and she saw the familiar handwriting on the letter which lay there. She stopped abruptly. One sentence stood out in a paragraph by itself.

"*The leather apron of Vulcan has gone to make a new quiver for Cupid.*"

He watched her as she paused and lightly touched the letter with her gloved hand.

"If not in person, in spirit," she said coldly. "Perhaps some day *she* may come here, too."

He frowned and took a step forward, but she raised a hand.

"Oh, I'm not going to read it. The wife who reads

her husband's mail tempts the thunderbolts of the gods. Besides, Abby would never forgive me. Well, *adieu!* No, don't come down. I prefer to find my own way. Réné, you know, is waiting around the corner in a *taxi.* I know he must be furious by this time. No, no, I will go down alone. Good-by."

And she was gone, her tiny heels tapping defiantly on their way down the stairs. A moment later he heard voices and the shutting of the wicket door to the street. There was only left the faint perfume of her sachet, and the sharp sting of memory.

Resolutely he turned away from the window, and, walking to the desk, filled his black pipe with the cheap tobacco from its cotton bag, then sat and smoked.

CHAPTER XVI

SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW

LIGHT airs from the bay tempered the heat of the sun on the deck-awning of the *Alicia*, as the yacht swung idly at her anchorage in the harbor. The yacht club was alive with bunting, from every pole in sight fluttered the nation's flag, and a persistent clamor of firecrackers, and now and then the boom of ordnance came faintly across the water from the town. The small ferryboat from Jamestown wheezed laboriously by, giving the *Alicia* its wash, which she rode with the disdain of a swan for an ugly duckling. A purple haze hung over each shore which swam in the heat, and in the north were lost in the mingling of sea and sky.

In spite of pleasant invitations in Newport the guests of the *Alicia* had chosen to stay aboard until nightfall, and thus escape the noise and confusion of the Fourth of July. They had all slept late after the dance at the Van Sciver's cottage, and were now enjoying a restful opportunity for recuperation. Tommy McCall was sitting aft reading aloud to Nina De Witt, who made a charming picture in white linen against the pile of cushions amid which he had enthroned her. Sounds of stertorous breathing came from the transom near

them, by which, on a wicker-chair, Dudley peacefully slept. It was a custom he had an hour after meals—*auto intoxication* the doctors called it—and his wife and Tommy were in the habit of using it to their own advantage. Mrs. Wetherall was below having a massage, and Winthrop Townsend was gloomily playing his usual game of "Canfield" in the chart-room. Réné De Land sat near the wicker table amidships, with a long glass filled with ice at his elbow, deep in his chair, his eyes gazing over the water, his brows frowning at vacancy. His hostess, at a little distance, read a letter which she had taken from an envelope, already opened. She, too, was frowning, and in her absorption, it seemed, had quite forgotten the presence of her companion.

"I often wonder, Natalie dear," she read, "whether the kind of social nutriment you and I are accustomed to isn't bad for one's moral digestion, and whether it doesn't spoil one's appetite for staple articles of diet. Paté and truffles are very well in their way, but nobody can be quite strong without beef and potatoes. With us it seems almost as brutal to be candid as to be uncombed and unwashed. In a lower walk of life we would doubtless have come by this time to an understanding. I would have explained, you would have scratched my face, and we would have returned to normal relations, unruffled by the incident. But we are so accustomed to dealing in subtleties that these healthy amenities are denied us, and we are willing to keep up the subterfuge by existing on a footing to all outward appearances friendly, but which in your heart, at

least, is rather precarious. A little rustic plain dealing ought to go a long way to clear the moral atmosphere.

"If I weren't sure that your husband's relations with me (whatever they are) wouldn't in the least affect your happiness, I would hesitate even now to be honest with you. But since you are not on terms, it doesn't matter a great deal one way or the other. You are, for instance, very much more fortunate than I was when I first learned about Jack and Bertha Paget. I simply *adored* Jack, and Bertha hadn't anything to recommend her but a becoming hair-wash and a pair of theatrical eyes. I may be flattering myself, but I fancy I'm much more respectable. I don't use a hair-wash, and my eyes at least are my own. Besides, you don't adore Brooke. You've taken particular pains to show everybody how much you despise him. Naturally, he felt it, and so fled to me. But you won't begrudge him to me. I can't help it if you do, for I warned you once that he was far too attractive to be allowed to wander long unattached. Perhaps attached isn't a fortunate word. It doesn't seem to fit Brooke Garriott. I'm sure he's very fond of me, but he isn't the least in love, whatever he may have said at Gerry's. *That* was only the gratitude of the artless. He doesn't realize yet how carefully I planned that scene—alas! all but the witnesses. There is something in the man too big for paté and truffles to understand, Natalie dear.

"Do you know now why I have written you? It's on Brooke's account. I don't want you to think he's a

man to practice that sort of thing. If he were, I should have been the last woman in the world to have permitted it. I shall make him care for me if I can, but I admit that the fact that he's in love with you——"

The letter dropped to the deck, and Mrs. Garriott's eyes were suddenly turned toward the blue of the distant shore. The frown deepened for a moment, and then another expression flitted across her face, driving it away. Her lips were parted as though about to smile, but a tiny wrinkle between her brows remained to indicate a lingering perplexity. That was a curious piece of information. It startled her a little. Early in their engagement she had carefully suppressed the few symptoms of feeling she had discovered in Brooke Garriott, and she had not been much bothered by their recurrence. At times he had surprised her by his forbearance, and at others by the sharpness of the weapons with which he had met her antagonism. But there had been no sign of what Abby mentioned since their wedding-day, when they had met upon the terrace, and then—hot shame sent the blood coursing through her cheeks—that was not love. No man who loved could kiss so brutally as that. He was so strong—so strong. It was cruel to use one's strength upon a woman. She could never forgive him that insult, or forget his cowardice. She leaned forward and recovered the letter. What more did it say?

"—the fact that he's in love with you has robbed our relation of interesting possibilities. Is there a re-

ward for honesty in this world? If there is, please present me at once with a diadem. Jack joins me in affectionate remembrances. It was sweet of you to ask us on the *Alicia*, but our fortunes are at such a low ebb that Jack finds it necessary to stay near New York."

Natalie put the letter into its envelope. What nonsense! As if Jack's plans need have mattered. Her white, rubber-soled shoes tapped noiselessly upon the deck, and she slipped the letter into the pocket of her white flannel jacket. Her eyes sought the water, and the frown on her brow deepened again. The children on shore seemed to have exhausted their supplies, or were saving them until night, for she heard the wash of the ripples alongside, the call of the gulls, the low voice of Tommy McCall, and the breathing of Dudley De Witt.

Winthrop Townsend came strolling aft, and, one by one, following Nina's lead, they all went below. Natalie had risen, too, but instead of going immediately down, she stopped to lean over the rail on the shadow side, and watched the ebbing tide lick softly along the smooth steel hull of her latest plaything. She had begun to realize that she was horribly bored. Why was it that the future which beckoned so alluringly always led her on wild-goose chases in search of happiness. It frightened her to think how much more difficult she was finding the task of keeping herself amused. It made her think she was growing too old to get amusement from the kind of things that had once distracted

her. Everything had annoyed her to-day. Winthrop had been reminiscent, Dudley De Witt depressing, Tommy irritating, Nina selfishly unsympathetic, and Alida, her mainstay when Abby Kempton wasn't available, had an attack of megrims. She had never wanted Abby so much in her life as at this moment. Abby always had a way of forgetting her own troubles when Natalie was in need of encouragement.

Réné still lingered near her on the deck. She felt his presence, though she had not turned around to look at him. He was the one solace of an oppressive day. He seemed to understand her better than any man she had ever known. He seemed to learn her moods by intuition, and his silences even were sympathetic. She heard his step as he took his place at her side, and his voice was low and very tender.

"Bad news, Natalie?"

She faced him quickly. "No, Réné. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. You seem depressed."

A smile flickered at the corner of her mouth. "I am. I think I have Dudley's complaint—only mine is mental. Something has gone wrong with the world to-day. It's all made up of false notes."

"I'm sorry. Can't I help?"

She sighed. "I'm afraid I'd only end by bringing you into the discord."

"Let me try, won't you? If you and I don't jangle, perhaps the chorus won't matter."

"The chorus *does* matter, Réné. That's just the trouble. I'm so dependent on a background."

"There ought to be enough music in your heart and mine to make us forget there is such a thing as a chorus," he whispered.

"I know," she sighed. "But there isn't. I'm afraid I'm a failure. I'm not much of a pleasure to you, Réné. You'll soon be regretting——"

"You mustn't say that. I can't do without you, Natalie. Why have you avoided me on this cruise? It doesn't seem as though you had given me an hour. Has anything happened to change you?"

"No," wearily. "Nothing has happened. I have everything in the world I want. Perhaps that is what bothers me."

"You're thinking of Brooke Garriott," he said jealously.

Her lip lifted scornfully. "I am," she replied calmly. "It worries me to think how much I owe to the man. Half of all this is rightly his, and yet he has given it to me without a question—thrown it at me," she continued angrily, "as one would throw a bone to a dog. He puts himself above this sort of thing, and reigns as a kind of king in his grimy neighborhood. The worst of it is that he's happier than I am, happier than you and I can ever be. Only you and I and people like us laugh at him——"

"Abby Kempton——"

He had expected to add fuel to the flame of her wrath, but she turned inboard, and spoke more quietly. "Yes, they understand each other. It is a mystery. It doesn't make me very happy to think Abby likes him better than she does me."

"Don't think of them, then. That is Jack's affair."

"Oh, Jack," she sneered. "Can't you see that by this obligation Brooke Garriott has put me on my honor? Can I accept all he has given me without some return. My allegiance to him is weighed in money. He has bought me, body and soul. Every guest upon the *Alicia* owes something to him. And you, Réné—you have no right to be here."

De Land leaned more comfortably against the rail beside her. "Curious I don't feel that," he said coolly. "You speak of your obligation to him—doesn't he owe something to you? You saw, you heard. At every club in New York they are talking about it."

She turned toward him, her eyes wide with surprise. "Nina and Alida knew, of course," he added hastily, "and others heard."

"Oh!" Here was a new humiliation which she had not considered. She compressed her lip, but asked in even tones: "Of course, they've made a good story of it?"

He took out his card-case deliberately and handed her a printed slip. "It seems to me that you ought to know."

She took it and read:

"The Gerry Schuyler's *masque* has come and gone. But the echoes of that night of revelry are still to be heard within and without the portals of Mayfair. The best story, perhaps, is that of a young Westerner married within a few weeks to one of New York's loveliest spinsters. The bride discovered her best friend

flagrante delictu in the arms of her wedded lord, who was making an impassioned declaration of love. Daggers are drawn, and there are rumors of impending divorce."

She handed the paper to him without a word and sank into a chair. De Land slowly tore the slip to bits, dropped them over the side, and watched them float merrily astern.

"You still think you owe him something," he asked at last, "after *that*?"

A wanton breeze had sprung up, flecking the harbor with foam and putting a white ruff around the base of the light-house. The sun-rays, slanting lower, were burnishing the towers of the town and picking out the decorations in brilliant spots of color. Even the barrack buildings of the training station were less unlovely. With the cool of the afternoon there were signs of activity afloat and ashore. Motor craft were darting here and there, and a cat-boat, in which sat a happy girl and a boy, rounded the *Alicia*, while one of the occupants said something to the other, and then they both looked up and laughed. How easy it seemed to be happy.

"I think you're right, Réné," she said. "I have paid —in full."

He dropped on the hatch-grating and bent over her.

"Don't think of them, Natalie. What can you care? He seems to have worked a spell with Abby. She always liked unusual people. You ought to be grateful. She has cleared your path of doubts. It is very unlucky

that it should have been Abby. But your happiness is in the balance. The courts would justify a separation on those grounds—if you chose to urge them."

"No, no; I couldn't." She started away from him. "Not Abby. It was only a harmless frolic. It was her letter that reached me this morning. I can't believe——"

She buried her face in her hands and tried to think. Word by word she retraced the letter, and the memory of the bold characteristic handwriting recalled a phrase she had seen elsewhere: "The leather apron of Vulcan has gone to make a quiver for Cupid." The words had lingered in her mind, and seemed now to possess a new significance. She tried to recall in the letter one sentence to refute Réné's insinuations. She seemed only able to think of the reference to Jack and Bertha Paget.

"Did she admit that it was harmless?" he asked. "Can you believe it was a frolic when you heard what he said. A man with a kiss like that," he finished brutally, "is wasted in overalls."

"Réné!"

"Why didn't she come when you asked her on the *Alicia*?" he continued. "That would have been the shortest answer to the scandal. I'll answer that. She knew Brooke Garriott wasn't coming, and she wanted to be near him."

She looked up now, and raised her hand in protest. "That will do, Réné. I've heard enough. It seems I've lost a friend, and Abby has gained one. But I'm not as pitiless as you. No woman dare condemn the

frailties of her sex. God made us weak so that we might lean on the strength of man. You, Réné, would have had me follow you. You would take me abroad with you to-morrow, if I would leave all this and go. What right have you to condemn Abby Kempton or Brooke Garriott? You say it is your love for me—oh! let me finish—that you cannot be happy unless I am always with you; and yet you would be willing to hear my name spoken lightly in the very clubs that are now sneering at Abby. Women nowadays are doing that sort of thing, and men are marrying them. God knows why! Why should they marry women who will follow when they crook their fingers? You call it love. Love means something else to me. To a woman love is what the sun is to the flowers, bringing them out to blossom in every lovely virtue. Love must ennoble, Réné, not debase."

He caught her hand to his lips.

"You poor child," he murmured. "It is a strange kind of love that can always reason. I think I must have been mad then—there seemed so little hope for you. What cried loudest in me spoke to you. I wanted to save you from the fate of Abby and Nina. It was not selfishness. I thought it was for the best. Love means to me what it does to you. Haven't I been thoughtful of you, and patient? Do you know that soon I may be leaving for France, and there will be nothing left of you but a memory?"

She let her hand rest in his and listened while he talked. The storm had passed, and the sound of his voice soothed her, as it always did. For the first time

that day she seemed to be at rest. But she answered him in single syllables, and, though her eyes were shadowed and calm, they looked afar.

After a while she spoke again, smiling now: "Yes, Réné dear. I'm sure you're quite the least impossible of your sex. You never annoy me. I'm sure I'm not quite happy when you're away. Why is it that I'm not mad about you? Can you tell me? You're very attractive. Some women would have lost their heads at such attentions. I think perhaps there's something missing in my make-up."

"Don't, Natalie."

"There—you may kiss my hand. Six bells. It's time to dress. Au revoir. Will you dance with me?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE GRUB AND THE HUMMING-BIRD

SO immersed was Garriott in the work at the shop that during the day there was little time to think of personal matters. Early in July a successful test of his wagon truck was made in the presence of a number of capitalists from the West, who had been for some time aware of the consummation of his plans. A company had been formed, and preparations were made to manufacture the Garriott engine. Already had contracts been signed for the use of the engine for ventilating purposes on two of the largest transatlantic steamship lines, and a South American railroad had ordered a number of wagon trucks as feeders in agricultural districts where the facilities for marketing products were inadequate. There seemed no chances of failure now, and, with the approval of the executors, Garriott disposed of some of the trust company stock and bought stock in the Garriott Company for his wife. The contracts for the manufacture of the engine and trucks were let to responsible bidders, and his prospects were bright for a satisfactory return on his labor and investment.

Meanwhile his other work went on, and it seemed very sure that within a month or two the car tests

would be successfully made. In New York City there were a few lines of street railway which still used horses. One of them was in danger of losing its franchise if it could not soon find a practicable motor. The last tests of the storage battery on its line had been unsuccessful, and Garriott's heart was high with hope. He had already installed an engine and generator experimentally on one car at the barn, and had run the length of the line with a carload of officials. There had been some changes, some new parts to design, and he kept his force working night and day to put a machine together in time to meet the road's requirements. They offered him $9,000 a car, and if that car was successful would order a hundred more. Garriott's motor, complete, could be made for $1,000. A car cost $1,800 to build, and that left him a profit of $6,000 a car, or $600,000 if he filled the whole contract. He had letters, too, from traction companies in other cities, and the possibilities for money-making seemed limitless.

It was a trying summer. For weeks at a time the mercury hung in the nineties. But occasionally a breeze blew in from the sea, giving those who were forced to stay in town a brief period of recuperation. The work was hard, and, stripped to undershirt and overalls like his men, Garriott delved in the shop amid the smoke and flying cinders from the forge. He was in training again, hard as nails, without an ounce of flesh that he didn't need. If things had not been going so well, perhaps he might have known how hot it was, but he was so eager to bring his last tests to a successful conclu-

sion that he was unconscious of the conditions under which he worked. He knew that he sweated profusely, but that was nothing new. It made the shower-bath at the end of the working day the more refreshing.

At night he was often alone. His room, while less sumptuous than his quarters at "The Grange," at least was more pleasant than the one he had shared with McMurtie at the "Taylor House," and when he was too tired to write or read he was glad enough to tumble into bed. Sometimes he took O'Dowd to a roof-garden, where they sat and smoked, and often worked out again in a different way the problems of the day. Once or twice he had called up college-mates who were in business in the city, and had gone to a theatre and to the cafés, but these were dissipations which made him want to sleep late in the morning, and, as a rule, he preferred to dine alone and go to bed. He needed all his energies for the task he had set himself.

A dozen times in the solitude of his room he had sat, pen and paper at hand, trying to find words to write to Natalie, but each effort had ended in the waste basket. What was there to say? He had a strong impression that his duty to Abby demanded some sort of explanation of his own conduct which might exonerate her. But nothing that he could think of seemed really to explain, and so the letter was unwritten. After all, perhaps it was better so. If their relations had not improved when they were seeing each other, no letter that he could write could be expected to accomplish the miracle. Often on those nights when he was too weary to sleep, and his tired brain was at the mercy

of his imagination, he would lie awake until dawn trying to find a way out, and then every by-way of the mental maze seemed to lead to the one thoroughfare—divorce. There was no other solution of their difficulties. Once or twice, at "The Grange," he had fancied that perhaps it would still be possible to win her for himself, but now he had given up. In those dark moments the bitterness of his position set him at war with himself and all the world, for he realized that every effort to master himself had failed, and that in spite of all prudence and intuition he loved his wife more than ever. Was there no cure? Apparently not. He loved her for what she ought to be, for the fruits of the spirit which still hung upon the tree, yet would not ripen, and for brief glimpses he had been afforded of tender womanly virtues in her treatment of others, which appeared the more lovely by contrast to her uncharity to him. He made no effort to deny his jealousy of De Land. De Land had been taught in courts; Garriott, in camps. He possessed every grace that Garriott lacked. Garriott wondered if he had met De Land elsewhere, whether his judgment of the man would not have been different. It was hard to say. He had never yet made friends with men of De Land's kind. Perhaps marriage with Natalie might make a man of him—marriage sometimes improved men of his type. Although she was not to be for him, Garriott seemed to have a curious half-fatherly interest in her future happiness. It would be his privilege, when the time came, to provide her with the proper testimony for her divorce, and there was a grim irony in the thought of the sacrifice

that this was to require of him. And yet he could not feel that he was giving her up. One could not give up what one had never possessed. All he had given her was his name—loaned it to her that together they might take a dead man's money, and cheat the Fate that had destined them both for poverty. He would never have been able to accomplish what he had done in so short a time without the facilities Oliver Judson's money had brought him. He was grateful for the helping hand, but it seemed clearer than ever that what he had used must be considered as a loan. The amounts he had used were not large when compared with the sums his wife had demanded, not so large that, when the new company's business was in full operation, he could not pay them all back with interest to the estate. Natalie should have it all, and if the gods were good to him she need never know the exact nature of his sacrifice.

He had given her no suspicion of how things were with him. He was thankful that she had not been kinder, for there had been moments when a word would have placed him at her mercy. If he had not been spared the pains of unrequited love, pride at least had presented a valiant front to the dear enemy. At first the affair at Gerry Schuyler's had seemed a calamity. It seemed that that brief moment in the pavilion had robbed him of his weapons and placed them in the hands of his wife; but now he had learned to be thankful to Abby for her share in the illusion. His wife had discovered him making love to another woman.

Let her think what she chose of him, so long as she did not guess the truth.

And the other woman! There had been twinges of conscience about her, too, but he had experienced less difficulty in writing to Abby, and he had poured out his heart in an ingenuous epistle, reflecting the philosophy and code of a by-gone generation, a literary curiosity among the morning mail of the lady of fashion, a boyish message of friendship and esteem, evading no responsibility, asking only for forgiveness. But the note he had received in reply was something of a shock. The very ink and paper laughed at him. It mocked at all seriousness, tore his simplicity to tatters, and scattered the fragments to the winds of misrule.

"Your letter breathes apology, contrition, and, sensibility (it read in part). Tremble no more, child of the truthful West. Now that the smoke has cleared away, I find that I'm very slightly damaged. A little mental furbishing and spiritual renovation, and I am as good as new. A new label has already been supplied, for the advertisements have neglected nothing. . . . Of course not; why should I care? At a bound it seems I've reached my full stature—'snatched a grace beyond the reach of art.' I'm actually an object of unusual interest to everybody. . . . Why do you apologize for kissing? Is the bitter stronger than the sweet? You remind me of the faithful servant who with a rock killed the wasp upon his sleeping master's nose, and, incidentally, the master. I think I can stand anything better than to have you sorry. We

must revise—together—your code of morals. You belong to the Stone Age—hence, I suppose, the rock. . . . I'm coming to town to-morrow, and I insist that you take me to lunch at an expensive restaurant. Perhaps we may be seen. It's a pity that there's no fire for all this smoke! Can't we kindle a spark?"

The next morning, true to her promise, she called him on the 'phone, and they met at lunch. A month had passed since they had seen each other, and she seemed surprised and a little alarmed at his appearance.

"You've been working too hard. You're thin. I'm fearfully worried about you."

He laughed. "I haven't been so well in years. I'm strong as an ox. Feel that." He thrust his arm across the table that she might feel his forearm. It was corded and hard as a steel cable.

"Are you really well?" she asked doubtfully. "Your eyes are deep-set, and your cheek-bones are all shiny."

"I've been polishing them well for this occasion. I don't lunch *here* very often."

"It's a pity you don't. From your look, I'd say what you need most is a square meal—and I'm going to order one."

And, waiving his prerogative, she set about it diligently from *hors d'œuvres* to coffee, while he watched her, gratefully aware of her commanding femininity.

"There!" she cried, as she finished. "At least to-night you won't starve. Now, tell me what you're doing."

"Working. I think I'm going to make some money," and he told her of his prospects.

"I'm glad; but all the money in the world won't cure you if you're sick."

"I'm not going to get sick. Besides, I've no choice. I'm not going to live on Natalie any longer."

She leaned across the table and searched his face keenly. "On Natalie?"

"No. I'm giving her all the Judson money. I never had any right to it. She was badly treated, and I'm not going to have any further share in the deception."

She had rolled back her glove, and the oyster on her fork was suspended in mid-air. She laughed softly to herself, and put the oyster on the dish.

"Will the wonders never cease? You are quite the most remarkable husband I have ever known. You are providing her with the sinews of war, leaving yourself without defenses."

"I don't need any. I'm giving her up."

"To De Land?"

"Yes, if she wants him."

The smile on Mrs. Kempton's face faded, and her eyes were bent soberly down. She sat silent for a moment, until the waiter had passed the condiments.

"Do you realize what you're doing?" she asked, "that you are putting yourself in De Land's power—playing into his hands? All they needed was money. Now you've supplied them with that, they'll do as they please."

"I know——"

"That she'll divorce you and marry him?"

"Yes. That was understood from the beginning."

"Did *you* understand it?"

"I understand it now. I understand many things better than I did."

"But he's with her now—aboard the *Alicia*. They are seen everywhere together. You can't relish that."

"No; but things are different now. I've put her on her honor. No woman could take all I've given her and not feel some obligation. Besides, what can *I* say? I'm not going to give *you* up—that is, unless you want me to," he finished gently.

The waiter began serving the iced consommé, and she could not reply at once, but she rewarded him with a look. In a moment she replied:

"I don't think I want to be given up, but I had not thought of this sacrifice. No one in the world but you would have done such a thing. With money you could have made her do as you pleased."

"I tried that. It didn't work. Oliver Judson tried it, too, but she always had her own way." He smiled and shook his head. "Oh, no, Abby. I've thought it out. Even if she hasn't any use for me, perhaps she'll respect the name I've given her."

"You still hold a high opinion of a woman's honor. I'm glad you do. Perhaps you're right. Natalie has a Quixotic streak, but then that doesn't account for Réné. Besides, we two——" she gave a short little laugh—"you and I have rather weakened your position."

"I'm glad," earnestly. "I can't tell you how glad I am. It was the only thing that could show me just where I stood."

"With her," she inquired pertly, "or with me?"

"With Natalie," he frowned. "With you I don't seem to know any better than——"

"Other people do?" gayly.

"Other people don't count. I'll stop their talking. I called on the editor of the paper that printed that thing."

"Not——"

He nodded. "There was no one in the office but a red-haired typewriter girl. There wasn't a man in sight —I wish there had been. They were 'out of town,' she told me, but I'm going again."

"That was foolish," she laughed. "The editors of that paper are always out of town. Besides, it will only make matters worse. You must promise not to go again. Why should you care—if I don't?"

"You do care—and Natalie must—but I wasn't worried on my wife's account," he added hastily.

She was silent for a moment, but she noticed the change in his manner.

"Has she written you?" she asked at last.

"Twice—on business. Have you heard?"

"A number of times. I've been puzzled at the tone of her letters. She seems to have been unsettled and worried, and I couldn't account for it. Perhaps after what you've told me I can find an explanation. She wants me on the *Alicia*. They're at Bar Harbor now, or were last week, but were sailing south to Narragansett. I'm not going."

She stopped abruptly, and he made no comment, though he would have liked to ask questions. He turned to his salad. The luncheon was good. Hard work

and plain fare had given it a new flavor, and he realized that his companion had a charm which he made no effort to deny. But she was quieter than usual, and when he turned to general topics answered in monosyllables.

The crowd in the lunch-room had thinned, and by the time the coffee and ices were brought, Garriott and his companion had most of the room to themselves. After a while he asked her why she was so quiet.

A shade passed over her face, and she put her hands to her brows for a moment.

"I'm worried about you. I always hoped—I had always wished that you and Natalie would learn to care for each other. Once or twice I thought perhaps she might——" She paused, thinking. "It makes a great difference to you, to her, to us all. It makes a change in my way of thinking about things, too."

"How?"

"The relations between you and me, for one thing. I've been your sponsor; I've understood and tried to be your friend."

"I couldn't have endured it without you."

"I know; I was sorry for you. I'm sorry for you now. But what you've done and what you're planning to do make my position ambiguous. Am I your friend? Or am I Natalie's? People think I've already decided. I wonder if *I* have? I couldn't go on the *Alicia*, though that would have ended the gossip. I don't seem to care about seeing Natalie. I think, Brooke dear, that I oughtn't to see you, either. But we do really get along beautifully, don't we?"

He wanted to speak, but she wouldn't let him. With a bright glance and one of those swift changes in mood which always so surprised him, she went on rapidly:

"I wonder if you know why I hunted you up. Do you? I'm going to kidnap you again. I did it once before—do you remember?—only then I was kidnaping you for Natalie—now I'm doing it for myself. I'm coming down to the Schuyler's for the week-end, and you're coming along."

"But, my dear Abby——"

"Nothing in the world that you can say will make the least difference. I've been planning it for a week, and your state of health makes it an act of charity. What work can you do if you break down? You're the color of parchment. A breath of salt air, a change of scene and rest will do wonders for you."

The prospect delighted him, but he shook his head. "I can't. I'm just reaching a critical point in some experiments. Besides, the Schuylers are friends of Natalie's. I wouldn't care to incur any obligation that——"

"That's nonsense. Gerry likes you, and Carol took particular pains to ask you. I brought her note with me."

"It is very kind," he protested.

"There is nothing left for you but to pack your suit-case. The motor will be at the house at five. You've exactly an hour and a half."

He finished his coffee and set the cup down.

"You always have your way, don't you? I'll go to

Habberton, but I think I'd better stay at 'The Grange'."

"What is the difference?" she insisted.

"Oh, I've a corner there, merely to keep up appearances. Natalie asked me to go down once in a while."

"That was kind of her—and have you been?"

"No; I hadn't time."

Mrs. Kempton drew on her gloves, and Brooke asked for the check.

"Oh, well," she said with an air of resignation, "it doesn't make much difference—so long as you're away from here. I suppose I ought to think I'm lucky to get you to cŏme. You'll dine at the Schuyler's, won't you?"

"Of course; and, perhaps, if I ride over for you in the morning, you'll come and breakfast with *me*?"

"Don't tempt me. I might accept. Poor Mrs. Grundy! How her tongue would wag! 'Hilarious' must be mad for a canter. Oh, for a breath of the morning breezes from the Sound. The thought is enticing. Perhaps, after all, you'd better stay at 'The Grange.' *À bientot*, my friend."

He put her in a hansom and made his way to his lodgings.

CHAPTER XVIII

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

THE groom took the horses at the terrace steps, and Garriott followed his guest indoors. It had been a wonderful morning. Garriott had risen at dawn and had sped across the harbor in the *Vas-y* to Long Point—it was shorter by four miles than the road—and had found Abby waiting for him by the pavilion—the fatal pavilion. Before sun-up they were at "The Grange" and out on the road. There was a delight in the surreptitious character of their ramble. The roads were deserted, the horses fresh, and a breeze from the north had brought a sharp nip in the early morning air which lent to the illusion that the season was still at early spring. But the perfume was that of mid-summer, wild roses fought for precedence along the hedges amid the luxuriant ivy, and the lush grass was spangled with daisies. For all they knew, they were the only people in the world. They spoke little, but their silence was eloquent in appreciation and understanding. The yellow tinge in Garriott's face had been carried away in the swift rush of new blood, and in the eyes of his companion a light shone, the gleam of a new impression, the luster of a renewed emotion. The hour was hers, and the warm glow of her enthusiasm made him hers, also.

In the breakfast-room Bradley was awaiting them. A month of rest had done him good, or so it seemed, for he and the *chef* outdid themselves in the preparation of the *dejeuner*. A great grape-fruit flavored with maraschino, each half sunk in a hemisphere of ice, nestling frigidly in a bed of white roses; cold bouillon; chicken liver *en brochette*, an *omelette soufflée*, with some extraordinary potatoes, rich black coffee, and some *petits pains* completed the repast.

It was a meal for gods, and they ate ravenously, with the appetites of health and youth and the zest of a new situation. Breakfast finished, they moved their chairs to the bay-window, where they could look out over the tennis-court and the water. The shadows on the lawn were shorter now, the heat-haze was rising from the dew, and the scrupulous mid-morning sun was searching the shadows.

She looked up at him through the smoke of her cigarette and smiled. He had never minded her smoking, and could not precisely tell why. Her cigarette seemed a part of her, like her laughter or the eloquent expressiveness of her gestures. Brooke had filled his black briar, and was watching the sails on the harbor, a picture of masculine contentment, the sloth of the healthy animal at rest.

"The sun has never seemed so garish or the day so derisive," she sighed. "Why can't day be always young? There is no hour so insensible as ten o'clock in the morning."

He laughed. "It has been very good to us."

"No. That was Bradley and the cook," she cor-

rected. "It *was* a good breakfast—better than 'a loaf of bread beneath the bough,' my friend. Did you order it?"

"I said I'd have a guest for breakfast."

"I have no business to be here," she broke in. "I shouldn't have stayed. Suppose Natalie should come in suddenly!"

"She wouldn't mind in the least. I think she has shown that. Besides, she isn't coming."

"I hope not. Even though she doesn't care about you, there's something unpleasantly familiar in the way I've taken possession of her lares and penates."

"Which am I?" he asked in amusement.

"I don't know which kind husbands are—your kind of husbands—and I really haven't taken possession, after all. But since I didn't go on the *Alicia*, my presence here shows a preference for your society to hers. She wouldn't like that."

"She needn't know, if you don't want her to. I won't tell her. I probably won't see her. There's nothing that she can object to. She didn't ask my permission to take De Land on the *Alicia*," he muttered.

"There's a difference." Abby moved her head dubiously. "You've made her a present of Réné, but so far as I can see, she hasn't made *you* a present of *me*."

"She has made no objection, no comment, even—silence gives consent—*ergo*: You're mine." He was a little proud of that deduction, and stood before her, smiling triumphantly. But she would not look up at him. She was sniffing at the honeysuckle on the window ledge.

"Yes, but where does Jack come in?"

"Jack!" He sank into his chair, aghast. "Do you know, Abby, I've never even thought about Jack?"

"He's been thinking about you. It's very foolish of him. He has never made it a practice to bother about my affairs. I thought we had reached an understanding—it seems we haven't. Recently Jack has been a nuisance. He has been hanging around the place until I've been at my wits' ends to be rid of him, so I sent him off to Bertha and slipped away."

"He's getting what was coming to him," Brooke growled. "A man without the sense to appreciate a woman like you doesn't deserve you. I'd tell him so for a nickle."

Mrs. Kempton was seized with a fit of merriment, and he watched her uncertainly.

"Poor old Jack! I really think he's tired of Bertha. She's gone off terribly this year. She has developed a pair of cheek-bones—like you—only you don't rouge. Only the young can afford to be artificial. In Bertha it suggests unpleasant ideas. Poor Jack is between the devil and the deep sea."

"The deep sea?" he murmured, watching her.

"I only know that Bertha is the devil," she sniffed. "I don't remember anything that has pleased me more than those cheek-bones."

He sat puffing at his pipe and listening while she talked, smiling at times, serious at others, trying to discern how much of what she said was meant to conceal her thoughts—how much she wanted to reveal.

"You *are* the deep sea, Abby," he said when she

paused. "I've thought more than once you were still in love with Jack. But when you try to create that impression, I think you're not."

She turned toward him, startled. "You see," he continued, "I've learned to read you by opposites. I carefully reach a rational conclusion; then, by reversing my judgment, come somewhere near the fact. Isn't that true?"

He leaned forward, searching her face, but she resolutely looked past him out of the window. A wan smile flitted into her eyes, as she turned at last, but she lowered her lashes as she spoke.

"Yes; that is true." Her voice was scarcely audible. "I *have* given Jack up. I could never live with him again. He knows it."

Brooke laid his hand gently over hers, and her fingers returned his pressure. In the fleeting glimpse he had of her eyes as she glanced up and away from him again, he saw the look they had worn that day when he had taken her out in the *Vas-y*. It was a dangerous moment. There was something wonderfully appealing to him in her tranquil submission, something inexpressibly pitiful in the softened lines of resignation which he could see in her face in repose. They were so unlike her. He knew now that she tricked the world with spurious gayety, mocked at sacred things to hide her own wounds, and smiled and laughed that the tiny lines he saw there might never be discovered. It seemed as though she had purposely given him that glimpse of what she kept hidden, that he might know how near and dear a friend he was. It was a pity for her that ex-

cluded all other thought. He took her hands in both of his as though some of the warmth in his heart might flow through them to hers.

"Abby," he whispered; "Abby, look at me."

But her eyes still turned away from him, she rose, and withdrew her hands.

"No, no, Brooke. I—I must be going. It's getting late. I shall be missed. I told them nothing at the Schuylers'. They'll think it very strange. You must —please take me over at once. Will you?"

He stood regarding her soberly.

"Of course," he said. "We'll go over now. Only it seems as though I might do something to make you happy. You've done so much for me. A brotherhood of consolation isn't far removed from love itself."

He had followed her to the table where she was standing, her back to him, plucking a rose from the centerpiece. At the last word she glanced at him quickly over her shoulder. But she turned away again, and he noticed that the fingers which fastened the rose into her blouse were trembling.

She answered him slowly, choosing her words with care. "Don't try to deceive me, or even yourself, Brooke. I know—I've always known you loved Natalie. Do you think for a moment I believe you felt what you said that night at Gerry's? I've had that sort of thing said to me before. It had a false, familiar ring—and, of course, it was all nonsense. Only the presence of others gave it a kind of half-tragic dignity which made us both think it meant more than it pretended."

She turned and faced him mockingly. "Oh, what dif-

ference does it make? I don't care what people think. So long as I know it was only make-believe, it can't hurt either of us. I'd be sorry to think you could make such a fool of yourself. Love isn't the only thing in the world. There are other things more valuable. They were the things I liked in you. There didn't seem to be any nonsense about you. Frivolity doesn't become a man of your mould. Don't let's be sentimental again. I'm not sure I want consolation. That's the danger of a friendship between a man and a woman. There's no telling in what kind of mawkishness it will finish. Be my friend, if you like, but let's end it there. Come, let's go."

There was a hard little ring in her voice as she finished, and a steel-like glitter in her eyes. She went past him through the door, and he followed, wondering in what way he had failed. Down the lawn they went silently, their thoughts jangling, out of tune. This seemed the inevitable end to their happiest hours, nor did she speak after they embarked, except in short sentences. He would have given anything in the world if he could have told her that he loved her. That, somehow, seemed the only thing left for him to say. Neither her husband nor his wife would have deterred him, and it was not honor that held him back, as it once might have been, yet the words would not come. He knew better than ever that the feeling he had for her was something different—more disinterested than love, more warm than friendship—and yet the image of Natalie was persistent. He had seen her there at the breakfast table in the very chair Abby had occupied.

As Abby had said, the day was derisive. There was no hour so insensible as ten in the morning.

Only when they were approaching the landing at Long Point and the lines of the pavilion, its white columns and vine-covered Pergola gleaming white in the morning sunlight, did she again speak of themselves. The pavilion reminded her.

"Out in the world, Brooke, they say you have a reputation for truthfulness," she said, with her slow smile. "Natalie and Réné heard you swear you loved me, there's no reason why they shouldn't believe it. Everybody believes it, except you and me. Why is it that you lied?"

He flushed hotly. "I didn't," he blurted forth.

"Perhaps that night you didn't, but the words would choke you to-day—at ten o'clock in the morning."

"I regret nothing. I did not lie. The impulse——"

"Sophistry," she sniffed.

He had stopped the engine, and the craft glided shoreward soundless. He knew that she read him, and it seemed futile to reply. The breeze stirred the water and threw into their faces the reflections of a myriad of ripples, which danced gleefully in toward the beach, lapping musically at the timbers of the pier and float. With a gloomy look he busied himself in making the landing skillfully, then sprang out, and took a turn with the painter around the iron railing. She got out on the float, and he followed her up the incline to the boathouse. But she halted him there.

"You'd better not come back with me now. Motor over for tea, if you like."

He nodded abstractedly, his face still sober, his brow thatched with a frown. She started away—then suddenly stopped.

"If you love a woman, why on earth don't you tell her so?" she shot the question at him like a thunderbolt.

He raised his eyes, startled at her abruptness, and a dull red stained his brow.

"*Tell her so!* I—I—*have* told her so—she won't—she doesn't believe me——" He stopped angrily.

She was laughing again, this time with a frank delight that had no trace of inuendo. But she held up her hand with a gesture of conciliation.

"Don't!" she cried. "You misunderstood me. I don't mean the woman you'd like to love. I mean the woman you love, whether you want to or not. I mean—your wife. Has it never occurred to you to tell her so?"

He would not reply, but leaned against the railing and looked seaward.

"Thank me for the suggestion, won't you? Oh, very well. But think it over. All women aren't as clever as I am. She can't know unless you tell her. I'm sure she's insane about you. I've thought so for a long time." She began laughing again, and walked away up the path through the shrubbery, but he would not turn his head in her direction, and the snarl at his brows grew deeper. He straightened at last, got into the boat, and put on the power. He thought he heard her voice, mocking at him again, and when

he looked up he saw her hand waving at him from the pavilion.

Garriott did not go to the Gerry Schuylers' that afternoon or that night. Instead of putting directly back for "The Grange" after leaving Long Point, he set the bow of the *Vas-y* for the open water of the Sound, rejoicing in the rough water and the freshening breeze, which caught the leaping foam from the bows and drove it past him, down to leeward. She shipped a good deal of water, so he raised the hood and put on his power again, rejoicing in the swift rush of the sea alongside, the singing of the wind in his ears, and the cool, salty taste of the stinging spume. He was in a mood for combat, and he gave the *Vas-y* all the power she could safely use, taking the seas broad on her bow, so that he could feel the shock of impact as she bored into them. Her seaworthiness and power delighted, and he listened in vain for a note of protestation from the quivering engine. There was no time for thought of his own problems, but above the roaring of wind and water he seemed to hear the mocking laugh of Abby Kempton, and her voice, as she spoke of "the woman he loved whether he wanted to or not."

The Connecticut shore was now quite distinct. He was surprised when he looked astern to see how far he had come, so he slackened speed and made a wide turn, taking a ducking in the trough and swinging around, homeward bound. With both wind and sea astern, the *Vas-y* ran like a frightened leopard, and

the seas chased after her, their green crests leaping vainly, as she sprang away for the harbor mouth. Within the bay the sea-pack gave up the chase and fretted out their discomfiture on the sands of the bar, while their quarry, a bone in her teeth, sent them back the wash of her wake, and sped home in safety.

Brooke moored her at the pier, then walked slowly up the hill to the house. His ride had brought into service an unused set of muscles, and the cool and damp of the open water had stiffened them. "If you love a woman—why on earth don't you tell her so?" Why not! It seemed simple enough—a few short words, and he was lightened of his burden. He would have liked Natalie to know, if she had been any one else but Natalie. But he had only to summon a vision of her, and the thing was impossible. He could not bear that words which were so deep in import to him, should fall on intolerant ears. Abby's taunts were only mockery, a refined and skillful kind of bull-baiting she sometimes indulged in, when his obstinacy or obtuseness provoked her, but they still lingered in his mind. She had set about his ears a swarm of fancies, but, like Pandora, she had kept hope captive. It angered him to think how the long nights of vigil, when he had fought the fight which had resulted in his self-effacement, could be set at naught by a few idle words.

With an effort of will he addressed his mind to other matters. After the bath and lunch, he whistled for the poodles, and, pipe in mouth, went for a walk around the place. The foundations for the swimming-

pool had been laid, and the masons were busy putting on the bricks. He walked over to the tool-shanty and looked over the blueprints with the foreman. It was going to be a handsome improvement, and to cost $20,000 at the least. He visited the stables, kennel and garage, where idle men sprang to their feet at his approach and busied themselves with neglected tasks. Etienne, the chauffeur, had brought from town the new racing machine, and was getting ready for a trial spin. Garriott sent the dogs to the stable and went with him.

So the afternoon passed. As the dinner hour approached, Garriott felt less inclined than ever for society and 'phoned his excuses, pleading indisposition, to Mrs. Schuyler. He dined alone, and went up early with his pipe and a volume from the library. The book was one which required no effort of concentration, and he soon lost all sense of time. He was conscious of the ringing of the telephone bell and, later, the sound of an automobile on the driveway—evidently there was "joyriding" here, too, but that was none of his affair. So he filled his pipe again and finished his book at a sitting. Then with a sigh it fell into his lap. He raised his eyes and looked before him—at the Bolted Door—it was still the symbol of thwarted hope, the semaphore that signalled a block on the road to happiness.

Suddenly he started forward in his chair, and the book dropped to the floor. Was the sound he heard a knock? Or had imagination played him a trick? It was so small a sound that he was sure he must

be mistaken. Who could be knocking at this hour? No, there it was again.

"Come in," he said, his voice grating harshly. He heard the turning of a key, the shooting of a bolt, the door opened, and his wife stood in the threshold.

"I don't feel like sleeping," she murmured. "I saw your light—may I come in?"

CHAPTER XIX

CONCILIATION

SHE wore something blue covered with lace. To his untutored mind it seemed like a tea-gown, or "wrapper," only it was very light in texture, and fell from the lines of her figure and trailed out into the obscurity of the corridor from which she had emerged. He was not sure that he was quite awake, and stood staring, wondering if it was really Natalie, or only a phantom of Hope. But the door was no longer bolted. It had swung outward wide upon its hinges, and the phantom was smiling.

"You seem surprised," she laughed. "Didn't they tell you I was expected?"

"No. I've been reading. They probably thought I was asleep. I didn't hear you come in. Won't you sit down?"

He brought forward an armchair, put his pipe on the table, and, as she sat, moved to the mantel, unwilling to believe that her visit was without an ulterior motive. He remembered that once before she had visited him, with something to ask. A similar object, doubtless, actuated her now, and with an effort he repressed every visible token of his happiness, and stood with an awkward formality waiting for her to

speak. She was apparently very much at her ease, and leaned back in her chair regarding him curiously.

"Well, aren't you at least going to inquire for my health?" she asked.

"That's unnecessary, when one looks at you," he said civilly. "I've hardly ever seen you looking handsomer."

His sonorous voice had an odd quaver in it, but he paused, and when he resumed there was no further trace of it. "I thought you were miles away from here," he said quietly. "Where did you leave the *Alicia*?"

"In the Hudson. Dudley, Nina and Tommy had a tiresome house party up in the woods. We came down sooner than I expected. But I'm glad. It hasn't been very gay. The crop of titles at Newport is away below the average—one aged Spanish duke and an Italian marquis or two—it really wasn't worth while going back for tennis week. Bar Harbor was *deadly*—more Quakers than ever, and no dances. We actually stayed aboard most of the time and played bridge. But even bridge has its limitations; it gets to be hard work when you do it in self-defense. I never knew how much I loved "The Grange," and I found myself wondering why I ever left it. Oh——" she looked around her and laughed happily—— "It's so good to be back! It's home! And sometimes home is the only place in the world."

He made no reply to that, but his silence was very easy to understand.

"How comfortable it is! I used to come in here

and sit sometimes with Uncle Oliver. Have you been here much?"

"No. This is my first visit since I went to town. I—I couldn't spare the time."

"That is too bad. Your own discomfort seems to make the burden of my indebtedness to you so much the greater."

"Not at all. You asked me to come here when I could. That ended your responsibility."

His voice was pleasant, but his attitude was uncompromising. She noticed it, but went on, unheeding.

"Thanks. I'm very well. There is no excuse for my being anything else. But I feel a little ashamed of myself, when I think how hard you must have been working."

"I haven't had much leisure."

"You really are very tired." She was examining him minutely. "Won't you come over to the light, and let me look at you. Besides, when you stand up, you make me think I'm not welcome."

He shrugged apologies, and came over and took the chair by the lamp, and she leaned forward, her chin on her wrists, inspecting him. "Yes," she continued slowly, "you're thin—much thinner, than when I saw you last. It doesn't seem as if you had any right to let your system get so run down."

He yielded placidly to her inspection, as he realized that her interest was not simulated. But he was still upon his guard. Such sudden interest was too amazing to be true.

"You're very kind," he murmured politely. "I

haven't had much time to think about myself, but I'm quite well."

He stopped, and then looked at her with rather a frank expression of inquiry. He had no intention of committing himself, for here in his rooms, alone, he felt the spell of her presence, the subtle charm of her womanliness, which she had so suddenly shown him, and he knew that it would require an effort of will to keep his secret. The mask of enmity had so far proved an adequate disguise, and he prepared to don it if the spirit clamored too loudly for utterance.

"I suppose you think I've come to ask another favor," she said quietly.

"I was wondering what——"

"Don't do me an injustice. Strangely enough, I came in here because I wanted to see you and to talk to you. You probably don't believe me. But it's true. The light in this room seemed very lonely. I thought perhaps it wasn't too late to show you that I was glad to find you here."

He did not look at her, but a note in her voice made him distrust himself, and he fell back instinctively upon recrimination.

"I admire your courage," he muttered.

She looked at his profile steadily for a moment. What she found there did not dismay her, for she went on timidly: "I don't think I'm afraid of you. Curiously enough I seem to feel that here, in your own rooms, I can throw myself on your mercy. I don't see how I can flatter you more."

He appraised her rudely. "Of course, I should

feel very much flattered to have you speak to me at all."

"But you don't?" she asked.

"Yes," he drawled. "I think I do. But I'd be better satisfied if I knew the reason."

She smiled patiently. "I said your light attracted me. Call me a moth if you like—at any rate, here I am with no excuse or even a motive. Won't you believe me?"

He turned, facing her squarely, and his deep-set eyes looked at her so intently, that her gaze fell before his. He did not reply at once, and she felt that the success of her overtures was still hanging in the balance.

"I'd like to believe you—I don't think there is anything in the world that I would like more."

"You've set me thinking, this summer—curious, isn't it? I've been wondering about a lot of things. My judgment has somehow got askew, and there's so much I can't seem to understand. About *you*, for instance. Why did you offer to give up your interest in the Judson estate?"

"I didn't offer to give it up," he corrected, and as she turned in surprise, he went on quickly, "I *have* given it up. I have no need of it. It's yours." And then, with some hesitation, he told her of the partial success of his plans. "Of course," he finished, "it isn't a fabulous sum, but I think I shall have plenty, to pay what I owe."

She was still leaning on her hands, looking straight

before her at the wall. "Really," she sighed, "I suppose I ought to be glad, for your sake—but I'm not—for my own."

"Why?"

"It seems to make an end of all chance to show my appreciation of your kindness to me. That is one of the things that troubles me. I am just beginning to realize what your work means to you, and I thought that the best I could do was to help you with money, if I could. Now that you are self supporting, of course, I can do nothing for you."

"You've helped a great deal," he urged. "I might have relinquished my interest sooner. You see——" he laughed—"I was clever enough to wait until I had succeeded. You helped, whether you wanted to or not."

She was silent for a time, tracing the pattern of the lace upon her gown.

"But you still refuse to believe in the genuineness of my good-will. Oh, I can sense your hostility. You're not inhospitable by nature—but then——" and she gave a sharp sigh—"perhaps you're not altogether to be blamed. I mean to make a friend of you, if I can, but you haven't given me much encouragement. If I didn't think I'd been unjust to you perhaps it would be time to give up trying. I thought perhaps my visit here—alone—to your rooms—might mean something to you."

"I think it does," calmly.

"You mean curiosity, amusement, the mild excitement of disagreement."

But he had turned his head away from her.

"You forget," he said coldly, "that you and I have always been on terms of enmity. I began by trying to like you, by doing what I could to make your position bearable. I had gentle thoughts of you then. If you were to bear my name, I wanted, at least, to give you the protection of it—and I remember a certain thrill of honest pride in the thought of possessing you. You see, I admired you. It was a mistake," he said grimly, "for you hated me—you have always hated me. I stood as a type of the thing you had all your life sought to avoid—a barbarian, I was and am. I have not changed. We think differently, and we always will. Once I was foolish enough to believe you might find something to interest you in my life, or place some value on my opinions, but when I tried to advise you, you scorned me openly, before others, in such a way that I gave up hope that we should ever meet without unhappy results. And you wonder that your sudden friendliness amazes me."

His words stung bitterly, for she remembered that not all the fault had been on her side. She rose abruptly from her chair, and walked the length of the room, but when she turned, faced him resolutely, and with an effort addressed him.

"I—I am sorry—sorry for everything," she gasped. "I have done you a wrong. There! will that satisfy you?"

He, too, had risen and stood before her. He had not expected such a confession, and it confused him, making necessary a rearrangement of his thoughts.

"Thank you," he muttered, his gaze on the floor. "I had never hoped for that. I, too, am sorry—sorry for many things."

She did not ask him what he meant, but both of them understood, and when he looked up at her he saw that her hand was extended toward him. "Will you be friendly now?" she said.

He took her hand and held it in both of his, but he could find no words in reply. Her fingers were warm in his own, and the tempest raged anew in his heart. He was afraid to look in her eyes, for fear that she might read him, and there were many things unexplained. So he let her fingers fall, and turned away. But she sank in her chair again, and motioned him to a place beside her.

"Let us go back and begin all over again," she laughed. "Just to break the ice, suppose you smoke your pipe."

He picked it up and looked at it. "Do you think friendship would be proof against that? It isn't Attar of Roses."

She laughed. "Try me. This room has always needed a pipe to complete its local color."

"It has always seemed to me a desecration to smoke anything here but expensive cigars. Tibbott thinks so, too; I found him here smoking one." He stopped and questioned her abruptly: "Tell me—why did you keep Tibbott?"

"I thought he might be useful to you. Besides, he's a part of our inheritance, like Mr. Northrop. Don't you need him?"

"No, I think not, and Tibbott—Tibbott doesn't approve of me at all. But perhaps he may be useful to your guests," he added.

"I'm not going to have any more guests," she said slowly. "I'm going to stay here for a while—alone."

"I'm going in the morning," he put in quickly.

"Must you?"

His eyes sought her face, for there was a note in her voice he could not understand. It had already cost her something to make peace with him. Pride refused further admissions. He bent over her downcast head, his hands reaching forth, aching to touch her, while reason still held him speechless. It was friendship she had given him, and the frankness of her confession proved that it was friendship only. He was happy even with that, and he feared that she might learn how his heart had always longed for her, and the spell be broken. But his voice trembled a little as he said: "I've been here two days. I'd like to stay longer, but I must go. I'd like to come up to see you again if I may."

"I think you ought to stay if you can. It will be good for you. I was really startled when I saw you."

"It's a good deal to me to know you take an interest. You didn't always."

"How do you know?" she asked with a laugh. "I've never told you I didn't."

"It always seemed to me that you were more interested in my absence than in anything else."

"I don't think I was," she mused, serious again. "I

don't really know what I thought. The one thing that dominated me then was wounded pride, and it voiced itself in every possible way that might hurt yours, too. I did not realize at first how much I had to accept from you. You say that I hated you. It wasn't you I hated. I think, as a fact, I was rather pleased——" she smiled—"to find that you were not as unlovely as I had pictured you. Uncle Oliver didn't give me a very glowing description of you. In my heart I don't think I even disliked you. It was the thought you represented that maddened me, as I realized that my own training, my love of luxury and power had made it possible for me to sink so low that I could sell myself to a stranger. You typified Nemesis, and it was Nemesis that I hated—not you. And yet I married you. Comfort had always meant so much to me. I had a horror of the ugly side of life, and it seemed that anything in the world was better than the alternative offered me. At times decency came vaulting to my rescue. It was *then* that I realized how little of our trouble was your fault, and I tried to show you that I was sorry."

"Yes, yes," he interrupted eagerly, "I remember!"

"I remember, too," she added, "but it didn't seem to last, did it? So until the day we were married, I deceived myself with the belief that I could do as others did. Other girls in my set married for money or for position; married foreigners, some of whom I know to be—well, let's say impossible. It hasn't been the custom with us to look too deeply into the mouth of the gift horse. I had once thought of taking

a foreigner myself. Then Uncle Oliver died, and you came. I thought if other girls could make matches with such men, perhaps there would be no danger in marrying a man of my own race to fulfill a legal condition, when his life, so far as I could judge by appearances, was at least honorable. For months I deceived myself—until the day of our wedding, when I realized too late what a lie we were enacting. I suffered tortures, but I went through with the ceremony because—because I had given you my word. But I knew that for the sake of the luxuries I must still have to satisfy my fastidious body, I had perjured my immortal soul." She stopped and sighed deeply. "I had deceived myself, but I tried not to deceive you."

"No," he said grimly. "That is true. You didn't."

"It seemed to me that as long as you understood our relation, we might manage to get along together, somehow—and there was a crumb of comfort in the fact that you, too, had lied. What I most feared, I think, was that you might believe I cared for you—and that made me harder and more bitter than ever. Perhaps, if I had taken pains to know you better, we might have had an understanding of some sort, which would have made things easier. But I had begun by antagonism, and I was afraid to recant. I wish you might have taken me and taught me then."

"I tried, but there were reasons why you wouldn't listen."

"Oh, yes—René," she said quickly. "Don't let's talk of that. That night I made an effort to be friendly. You were within your rights in questioning our rela-

tions, but it angered me that you should choose to exercise them. I had never had my motives questioned before. You were some new kind of being, and yes, I hated you that night. I hated you for yourself, for your will, for your ruggedness, for your animal strength which could conquer me!"

She leaned her head forward in her arms, upon her knees, and remained silent in that position, her breath rapid, her neck and shoulders warm with shame. Brooke was greatly disturbed. Throughout her avowal he had sat outwardly composed, but with the words of his own confession struggling for utterance. It was evident that she expected nothing from him, and went on until the end, while he listened in wonder. And as he saw her struggling with the shame of the memory of that night upon the terrace—the shame that he had wilfully brought her, it seemed as though he must throw himself at her mercy, and give himself for good or for evil into her keeping. He had made a step toward her. Then, as though with a sense of impending revelations, she straightened abruptly and laughed gayly up at him.

"Rather remarkable, this confession of my frailties, isn't it? I've never done anything that was quite so hard. I'm glad you're not sentimental. I don't think I could possibly have confessed to any other man in the world but you. Your sanity has always appealed to me. I forgive you that night on the terrace, because you kissed me in malice. If I had thought you had cared for me then, I think I should really despise you, even now."

Garriott sank into the chair beside her, again dismayed at the imminence of his declaration. His joy had blinded him to the shadows which still hung between them. For the moment he had forgotten De Land. But when he spoke, his voice was under perfect control.

"Yes, I kissed you maliciously. I'm glad you forgive me. I'm sorry. How can I do penance?"

She leaned forward, and laid her hand on his sleeve in a friendly way.

"By being my good friend at all times; by giving me advice when I need it; by reproving me with your superior male wisdom; and by letting me help you with money, if necessary, in your work." She rose and glanced at the clock. It was after two. "Horrors! Had you any idea it was so late? It's very—what shall I say—improper?"

"Oh, hardly!" He laughed. "Nothing matters to anybody but you and me."

"Good night—good night," she said hurriedly. "You won't mind if I bolt the door, will you?"

With a pretty gesture of compunction she fled, giving him a last smile through the crack of the door.

CHAPTER XX

THE TRANSIT OF VENUS

GARRIOTT heard the bolt slipped quietly into its place, and dropped into the chair Natalie had vacated. The occultation of Venus had been as abrupt as her appearance, and he rubbed his eyes, and looked again at the familiar mouldings of the white door with its glass handle and brass hinges, and wondered if he hadn't fallen asleep and dreamed. But he heard the sound of footsteps and the closing of the door at the further end of the short corridor, and after that—silence. There was an odor of lavender, too, and on the chair arm beside him was a handkerchief with a lace border, and the initials N. J. G.—one of the letters his as well as hers. How little that had signified to him in the month of solitary existence in the city, but how much here at "The Grange," which to-night he shared alone with her. He picked up the piece of lace and pressed it to his lips. If the Bolted Door had had eyes, it might have whispered his secret down the corridor, but it stared at him mutely, less unfriendly than on other nights, some months ago, when its austere lines had spoken so eloquently of intolerance and inhospitality. It was a very handsome door. He wondered that he

had never had the taste to appreciate its admirable proportions, the skillful joints and well-fitted mouldings—a gracious door, the gate to his own particular heaven.

The genuineness of her contrition almost atoned for its dispassionate origin—an awakening conscience and a delayed sense of justice. Of course, it would have been folly to expect more, and he found himself singularly content to sit where she had sat and go over again, with new interpretations, each chapter of her avowal. She had laid a particular stress upon the Platonic character of her sentiments, forgiven him his transgressions, and in the same moment praised his sanity. His sanity forsooth! Perhaps she did not know how near madness he had been. It made him happy to think that he could have brought her womanhood to blossom, though the reasons for its blossoming were still a mystery. It was the only time they had ever met on terms of understanding. The circumstance which had made the early breach between them still existed, and its shadow still hovered uncomfortably about their relations. But it was less substantial than before—more like a veil of fog, which, even by morning, might be blown away. She had not spoken of Abby Kempton, and he was grateful for her forbearance, but it seemed possible that her silence was actuated by delicacy rather than indifference. For no woman of Natalie's stamp, could care for the publicity which had followed his indiscretion. His conscience troubled him, on Abby Kempton's account as much as his own. He puzzled long, and when he went to bed, his problems were still unsolved.

The morning brought him a note by the hands of Leontine and Tibbott.

"Please don't go to town to-day. There are many things I want to talk to you about. If you will stay, I will breakfast with you at ten."

It was a command, and he lost no time in making a decision, though the black visage of O'Dowd obtruded, and the new work on the car-truck beckoned insistently. He was already down reading the morning paper, when she joined him, dressed in a shirt waist, short skirt, and a pair of high laced boots.

"You see," said he gayly, "I'm obeying the orders of my new captain."

She rewarded him with a gracious look. "I hope you'll always prove as obedient." She took her chair before the great Sheffield tray, which bore the Judson silver, and deftly presided.

"Isn't it a heavenly morning? What is the news?"

"Nothing much. The world seems to have stopped in its tracks to listen to the pulse of Wall Street."

"Stocks are down, of course," she said with a frown. "They always seem to be nowadays."

"Yes, lower than ever. There were two bank failures in Pittsburg yesterday, one in New York. I've never had to bother much about business matters until recently, but it seems as though there was a real cause for uneasiness."

"I'm sick of it all. Please don't tell me—not now. I'm not going to have my day spoiled. Later we'll talk of business. That is one reason why I wanted you. I think, after all, I'll have to call on you for advice."

"I'll only offer it," he laughed, "if you'll promise not to take it."

She held the sugar-tongs suspended over the coffee-cups. "One lump—or two?" she asked. "I ought to know, but——"

"One. It's never too late to begin. I feel almost certain we have sat here before and asked and answered the same questions."

"How curious. Were you thinking that?"

"Yes."

"So was I. I've been wondering what you must have thought of me last night."

"I thought you were an angel of mercy——"

"Rushing in where fools would fear to tread?" She set her coffee-cup down and looked out of the window. "What shall we do? There's so much, I don't know where to begin. There's mail here, too, the usual pile of bills, and a few letters—a long one, in an official envelope, from Mr. Northrop. I haven't opened it yet. I think I know just what he's going to say. 'Dear Madam——' " she cleared her throat, made a magnificent gesture, and dropped her voice into a masculine key—" 'It is with great regret that I call your attention to the necessity for further retrenchment, etc., etc.——' " She broke off with another laugh—"Can't you see him, with the thread-bare moustache in the middle of his forehead? He's really a very tiresome old man."

Brooke smiled at her impersonation, but was grave again. The items he had been reading in the morning paper had not been calculated to inspire amusement.

"Don't bother about the letter now. Let's put off the evil hour as long as we can."

"It's impossible. Northrop refuses to be put off. He holds me like the Ancient Mariner, with a kind of deathly fascination. You see, I can't resist him."

She tore the envelope abruptly, and read:

"Dear Madam:

"I am again advised by the Trust Company, of an overdraft of the bank account of Brooke Garriott and Natalie Garriott. As I am informed that Mr. Garriott has previously signed a number of the checks in this account in blank, I assumed that he has no present knowledge of your business affairs, and must, therefore, call the facts to your attention. I beg to notify you that the condition of business is such that banks willing, under usual circumstances, to overlook slight errors on the part of large depositors, are refusing to grant favors, and will not, under any circumstances, honor overdrafts of this size. I have arranged to take up this check myself, and must earnestly urge that in future you make a more careful computation of your check account. I will be in my office on Wednesday, and hope——"

She laid the letter down with a sigh. "You see—he's giving me the usual verbal spanking. What can one do with such a man?"

"Did you know you—we were overdrawn?" asked Brooke quietly.

"No. I hate figures. I knew I had been spending

a good deal of money, but Mr. Haliburton, at the Trust Company, always kept me straight."

"I fancy Haliburton has all he can do keeping himself straight."

She turned to him in alarm. "Are things as bad as that?"

"I don't really know, but Haliburton's name was mentioned in the papers this morning. He's mixed up in a lot of deals that don't seem to be coming out right."

"But he is one of my—our—executors. Uncle Oliver had the greatest confidence in him. You don't really think that anything's wrong, do you?"

"Oh, I don't say that——" He paused uncertainly.

"Well, what do you mean, then? I feel so helpless."

"Do you really want my advice?"

"Yes, yes."

He turned his chair toward the window and looked down the lawn, where he could see the masons working on the new swimming-pool. He made no reply for some time, and she watched his face in alarmed appreciation of the cause of his restraint.

"Won't you speak?" she urged.

"I don't want to make you unhappy, and perhaps there's no cause for anxiety, but I've known for some time that you were spending more money than you ought to spend. I don't want to preach, either, but if you'll remember, I spoke to you about it several times in the early days of our marriage. I was afraid you had no very definite idea of your income, or what a sacrifice additional expenses might entail at this time.

The greater part of the estate, as you know, is in the stock of the Trust Company, which pays a regular income, but the money for the *Alicia* and these improvements came from the sale of some other securities. It was foolish to sell those. I suppose I should have opposed it for your sake, if not for my own. I wish I had now. Of course, there is the railroad stock, enough to give you a small income without the interest in the Trust Company. What I want you to see, is that you should live quietly for awhile, at least until business conditions change. You asked my advice. That is what I suggest. It is easier for me to talk to you now, because you can't impute personal motives, as you did once before."

She sat in the window-seat, opening the bills and throwing them one by one into a waste-paper basket. "Thanks," she said at last. "I suppose you're right," and then with a sigh of impatience, "I wonder how other people manage."

"As you manage," he laughed. "Spend all they have, and put their trust in their creditors."

She tore the last bill and dropped it into the basket.

"What you say about Mr. Haliburton is alarming. I hope it isn't true."

"I hope not, but I don't think you ought to take any chances. Northrop, as counsel for the estate, should know the facts about Haliburton—if you like, I will go with you to his office. But there is nothing in the morning news that shows any weakness in the Trust Company."

She sat with her hands fingering Mr. Northrop's

letter, her brows puckered, her mouth drawn demurely down, like a child caught in a transgression. Her attitude was infinitely appealing to her husband, who had only known the cold sparkle of her pride, or the flash of her anger.

"Thank you," she said submissively. "I suppose I've been very foolish. My lease of the *Alicia* expires the last of this month, but I don't want to cruise any more. I think I'll stay here, if you'll tell me what to do." She stopped, rose, and inhaled a long breath of the morning air. "Come," she cried, "no more for the present. Let's try not to spoil our day. I'm wild to see the poodles and the car. Do you think you'd dare run it?"

That was a wonderful day to Garriott—one of the faultless days of sunshine without shadow to be singled out of recollection. They rambled over the place like two children, played with the dogs, petted the horses, and took a spin in the *Vas-y*, far out into the Sound, where the sea-pack hunted again. At luncheon they talked of their childhood, and laughed fondly at the eccentricities of their benefactor. She gave him Oliver Judson's description of the young workman on the railroad—"he's fat, Natalie, with freckles and a squint——" and Brooke retaliated with Uncle Oliver's warning to him. "She's a bit shrewish—a little shrimp, with eyes and skin the color of a faded cornstalk." And the revelation of a keen sense of humor in both seemed to add one more rational bond to the delight of their companionship. There was a charm, too, in their aloofness, a novelty in the discovery that their

relation condoned the absence of others, and anticipated the sudden confidences, which now came the more readily for having been so long delayed. Even when they took the motor after lunch, Natalie drove along the main road, and returned home without the thought of a suggestion of neighborly visits. She knew the Gerry Schuylers were at home, but she did not mention them, nor did Brooke. The presence of Mrs. Kempton in their house-party had tied his tongue. He was glad Abby hadn't telephoned. He had thought that perhaps she might.

When dinner time came, they dressed carefully, and met again, enjoying, in a different way, the formality of the oak dining room with its fine napery, the warm glow of its candles, and the gleam of its silver and glass, and the orderly service. It came to Natalie in that moment as a kind of inspiration, that here was the precise purpose for which such a home was intended. It occurred to her, that the room had never been adequately furnished before, for, curiously enough, what it most had needed was a host. It gave her a pleasant sense of satisfaction to learn how well her husband seemed to fit into the setting, which had once been the background for her extraordinary uncle. She had used to like the color of Oliver Judson's gray hair against the English portrait on the panelling between the windows, but she was not sure that Brooke's brown hair did not go better with the sumptuous arrangement. There was a kind of old-world formality, too, about her husband's manner, which gave her the measure of his adaptability. In spite of his careful groom-

ing, in which, for the first time, Tibbott had had a part, she remembered him as she had caught him at the shop, in the thick of work, dusty and begrimed. By instinct he seemed to understand her smile and question.

"I'm a kind of anachronism—isn't that what you mean?"

His intuition delighted her. She had thought that only Réné could ever read her thoughts.

"No," she said slowly, "I was thinking how admirably you fitted into the color scheme."

His heart leaped—he had carefully schooled himself all day, and she had taken pains to steer their craft past all sentimental hazards.

"I'm flattered," he said quickly. "It seems a pity the note is only accidental."

"I don't think I like your calling yourself an accident—even a happy one."

"You surely couldn't call me an unhappy one, not to-day?"

It was an amusing kind of banter, and served its purpose to continue the gay spirit, which had possessed them all day. With a different setting on the terrace, where the coffee was served, the warm August night promised a change of temper. It was the drowsy hour of poetry and sensibility, and the hush of contentment was over land and sea. Brooke drew their lounging chairs to the edge of the steps, where they could look down along the lawn and drink the perfumed moisture of the soft air, which caught a hundred subtle fragrances from thicket, bush, and garden-bed, as it

floated gently up to them from the water below. There were low-hanging clouds over the sea, but overhead stars were spread like daisies across the wide meadows of the firmament, and tiny patches of clouds browsed lazily in the heavenly pasturage. It was on such a night as this that they had met here before, and the memory of it came to them both in the same moment. Each seemed to know what the other was thinking.

"Are you sorry?" she asked.

He looked up at her quickly.

"God knows I am," contritely. "You must know now——"

"Sh——" softly. "I do."

He would have said more, but she would not let him speak.

"Have you had a happy day?" she put in.

"There's hardly need to answer that," he murmured. "I suppose if I told you how happy you wouldn't believe me."

She noticed the odd note in his voice, and, while she did not find it unpleasant, it warned her of the danger of the night.

"It's a pity you couldn't have had Abby," she said mischievously.

His look of reproach was almost pitiful.

"I had hoped you wouldn't say that."

"Why?" she laughed.

"Because it's meaningless—because I am as little to her as she is to me."

"You surprise me," she said suavely. "I thought——" then stopped and laughed suddenly—

"but then, of course, I can only judge by appearances. The last time I saw you together, for instance——"

"Stop, please." He sat up and faced her, his voice none the less insistent for being quiet, and she could not disregard the quiet note of command. "I've wanted to write you about that, but I didn't know how to say it. Perhaps you may understand now if I tell you."

"Is it necessary?"

"Yes, in justice to her. Abby doesn't care a rap for me. She took pity on me and played the Good Samaritan. I was grateful to her—I still am. That night——" he hesitated—"that night—I think I had had too—too much to drink—she lead me a chase, I caught her, and—and—you saw the rest."

"Yes," she said coldly. "I saw. You seem to have talent for that sort of thing."

Her sneer stung. "I know I deserve it, and so I can't complain. You must think what you choose of me."

He stopped suddenly. There seemed to be nothing more to say. He sank back in his chair sombrely, and fixed his gaze on the distant trees. A silence followed—a long and bitter silence, during which a hundred thoughts, banished for the day, recurred with all their old ugliness, to Garriott's mind. How could he have forgotten? The light went out of the stars like the light of her eyes, which she hid from him. A damp wind was blowing in from the east, and there was a hint of lightning low on the horizon. The brightness of their day was to end in storm. It didn't

seem to matter much one way or the other, but his conscience cleared, as he thought that for Abby's sake he had lied, lied like a gentleman. He did not know that through the fingers with which Natalie screened her brow, she was watching him intently, trying to read how much of what he said was true—how much false.

She pulled her wrap more closely about her shoulders, and leaned forward, and as the warm glow from the lights of the drawing-room played on her face, he could see that she was smiling.

"I don't know what you deserve," she said slowly, "but I think there are some things it is just as well for us to forget. Suppose, in spite of all, I choose to think well of you?"

"Can you?"

"I'll try. It seems such a pity not to be friends. Besides—there's Réné, you know."

"Oh, yes," he said savagely. "I hadn't forgotten." He rose, walked to the balustrade, knocked his pipe out on the railing, then took two or three turns up and down. When he stopped before her, his voice was as calm as her own.

"Come, don't you think we'd better be going in? There's a rain-drop."

In a moment she rose with a sigh. "I suppose if the skies were always fair, sunlight would cease to be attractive."

CHAPTER XXI

OLD ROSE AND IVORY

SHE stopped in the hallway and threw off her scarf. "Are you going to town in the morning?"

"Yes," he muttered. "I've stayed too long as it is. My holiday is over."

"Oh, very well." She tossed her head indifferently. "Do you need me here?"

It was a stupid question, and merited no other answer. "Oh, no, not at all. I'm never lonely, except in company."

She strolled into the drawing-room, and he followed, vaguely conscious that for the first time that day conversation languished. Doubt was abroad again. She went to the piano and ran her fingers idly over the keys, but when he asked her to sing, she promptly refused him, got up and sank on a couch. The big drawing-room seemed suddenly very empty and cheerless, and he sat stiffly in a renaissance chair opposite, and tried to make small talk. The effort was so forced, that she couldn't help laughing. But there was no malice in her humor, so he found himself smiling in return.

"You're so dreadfully formal," she said.

"I always feel so, in this room."

"It's too big for two," she admitted. "I never sit here except with visitors."

"Then this is where I belong," he said gloomily.

"There's your study. You can always go there," she bantered.

"Yes—alone."

"Unless you're polite enough to ask me, too."

"Will you come?" he said, brightening. "I was afraid to ask you."

"Why? I've already visited you without being asked."

Together they walked up the stairs. Natalie's door was at the top of the landing. For the first time in his recollection, it stood ajar, and he stopped involuntarily, catching a glimpse of pink drapery and lace. He had always had a wish to know what her rooms were like, and as she had noted the direction of his glance he told her so.

"Haven't you seen it?" She hesitated. "I'm afraid it's in frightful disorder. Go to your study, and I'll join you presently." And in a moment he heard the bolt of the door moved, and she stood curtesying in the opening. "Enter, Vulcan," she cried.

He turned, his face crimson. It had slipped his memory that she knew what Abby called him. It seemed that she was not ready yet to let him forget. Or did she thus establish her own security by keeping her husband on the defensive.

"Well——" she laughed—"aren't you coming?"

But he did not move, and only muttered:

"That was unkind. Haven't I humbled myself enough?"

"No, not yet. Not so much as I."

"You have confessed only half—I have told you all," he insisted.

She made no reply, and, turning abruptly, went back toward her rooms, but she smiled at him over her shoulder, and he followed.

Garriott did not know a great deal about feminine apartments. He couldn't remember ever having been in a girl's room in his life, so that he was hardly prepared for the dainty elegance of Natalie's boudoir. When he went in the door, it seemed as though a fresh Killarney blossom had been brushed across his eyes. The draperies were of some crisp, loosely-hanging stuff in a French design, of which the predominating note was old rose. Filmy lace curtains peeped between. The furniture was ivory color, in the lines of the last French empire. But there were English colonial chairs, too, of the kind made for comfort as well as grace. A couch, with pillows in all the variants of the color scheme from violet to pale pink, was drawn alongside the table, over which an ormolu lamp with a magenta shade shed a warm glow. In one corner was a dressing table, covered with gold toilet articles of a uniform design, silver photograph frames and mirrors; in the other corner, some bookshelves, with a few well-chosen volumes. There was a subtle odor of lavender, which seemed as though it might be caused by the blending of the colors. The whole room harmonized so perfectly with Natalie herself that it seemed a part of her.

His wife sat on the couch and motioned him to a chair near her.

"Do you like my taste?" she asked. "The furniture was all made at my order. The pastel over the mantel was done by a Frenchman. Do you think it is like me?"

She directed his gaze, but it did not follow hers to the pastel. On the mantel-shelf, below the portrait, in a silver frame, was a photograph of Réné De Land, and while she watched him, wondering what he was going to do, he got up, took the photograph, and put it, face downward, on the bookshelves.

"If you don't mind," he said quietly. "Three is a crowd."

His knowledge of women was not keen enough to advise him that the disparagement of one's rival is the most serious mistake a lover can commit. But her impulse to anger was still-born. Instead he found her looking up at him oddly. "Will you banish his pictures, too?" she mocked.

"Of course, you'll do as you please. I've made no effort to stop you. To-night, though, I'd rather he were banished."

"To-night? And to-morrow?"

"It will not matter so much to-morrow. I won't be here to see. I thought you wouldn't mind finishing the day as we began it—in submission to the spirit of harmony and peace. I want to remember you as I have known you to-day. I think perhaps some day I can learn even to think of you with *him*."

"Don't you want me to marry Réné?" she asked demurely.

He made no reply.

"He's very agreeable, you know," she went on, "good looking—and he makes love divinely."

"And that is your idea of a husband," he muttered half to himself.

"I don't know. I haven't decided. It's very pleasant to be appreciated. What is your idea of a husband?" she asked suddenly.

Garriott was very much disturbed. He got up and paced the floor uncertainly.

"My idea of a husband differs from yours, as your idea of a wife probably differs from mine. I think—I'm pretty sure, my idea is that a husband should be about everything Mr. De Land is not. It isn't always easy for a fellow to prepare for marriage in your set. If he doesn't drink and gamble, he's a prig. If he has good instincts, and lives up to them, he's a social failure. Where are the decent men of your crowd? Gone, aren't they! Because there is a real life for them elsewhere. So you must choose yourself a husband from those that are left—from among the idlers, the carpet-knights, and man-milliners! You want to know my idea of a husband? My idea of a husband is of a big, clean, whole-hearted man, with enough old-fashioned ideals left to keep his wife whole-hearted and clean, also—a man who can be tender when tenderness can soothe, and strong when a woman needs his strength tc lean on—a man who will guide and govern a woman by a love so great and yet so gentle, that she will not be conscious of its mastery—or his—a man who will be true until death, not because he has

sworn it at the altar, but because his love has made it impossible to be otherwise. *That* is the kind of man for a woman who deserves the name of wife."

She listened with her head down and her eyes hidden by her lashes, but he could see by the droop of her figure that she was not angry.

"And your idea of a wife?" she murmured.

He had stopped before the mantel, and was looking up at the portrait. His voice sank soberly to a lower key, and he went on unconsciously apostrophizing Natalie herself.

"I used to think I had an idea of what I wanted my wife to be. I don't think I ever thought of her as being beautiful. I've always been a little afraid of beauty. I always thought of her as the mother of my children, a woman kind, honorable, and true—a woman of big faults and big virtues, but with so keen a sense of justice that she could weigh my faults and her own without fear of prejudice. I would not care for a woman without faults. I think I'd even love her more for being a little selfish. No girl worth loving at all, can grow to womanhood without being a little spoiled by those nearest and dearest to her. I never had much use for anyone without character enough to lose his temper. But those are trifles, like the uneven bark or thorns upon a bush, whose beauty blooms in spite of them, and because of them.

"The woman I mean is uplifted whether she wants to be or not, by the soul that glows within, because its light was kindled before she was born, and because it's as much a part of her, as the shape of her hands,

or the sound of her voice. Careless friends, bad advisers, the customs of the day, may diminish it, but it can't be put out, because——"

He stopped abruptly, suddenly aware he was thinking aloud, and that the one person he was thinking of was his wife. But if she was conscious of his thought, she gave no sign, for she had picked up a magazine from the table, and was idly turning its pages.

"That," he finished quickly, "is my idea of a wife."

It almost seemed as though she had not been listening to him, but when he dropped into an armchair with a sigh, she laid the book on the table, and looked at him.

"Do you think there's a chance of your ever meeting a woman like that?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I met her——" He stopped again, sinking deep in the chair, his eyes closed as though by shutting out all sight he could thus silence memory, and keep thought captive. But her look, which he sensed if he could not see, burned through all his barriers. He knew that it was not an unfriendly look, and something told him that in spirit they were nearer than they had ever been. There was a physical attraction, too, in her presence, as subtle as the plea of the spiritual—the soft harmony of color, the gentle effulgence of the lights, the graceful suggestion of her flowing draperies. He fought himself in silence, steeling his mind against their sweet allure, hearing half consciously the pleasant patter of the rain, against the window panes, which did nothing to detract from the

grateful sense of shelter and the thought of their isolation.

She felt the intensity of his mute emotions, guessed for the first time the effort of will his self-repression had always caused him. What Abby had said was true. She had only to look at him and see. The moment was too burdened with meaning for the light jest that was ready on the tip of her tongue to intimidate him. He was very pale, his hands gripped the armchair, and the lines of his face, which she had noticed yesterday, were drawn in deep lines of shadow. It seemed that his efforts were on the verge of failure, for he opened his eyes, raised them to the portrait, and the words came forth whether he would have them or no.

"I suppose you would think it better if I spoke to you of other things here in your own rooms, where you have always been immune from outside unhappiness. But—God help me!—I can be quiet no longer. It hurts me here—weighs on me—and bears me to the earth. It has done so for a long time. Pride has fought with me for silence, when every impulse has urged me to speak—to tell you how—how it is with me." He paused again. "I don't think I ever had a chance—from the first." There was a tinge of bitterness in the smile he gave the portrait. "I don't know why I loved you then. I suppose it was just meant to be so from the beginning. I've sometimes wondered whether Uncle Oliver wasn't in league with the Fates. I only know that I did love you, from the first hour I saw you. It was hard, too, because it

has always been so hopeless. You belonged to another planet. I was the visitor from Mars. If I had been made in some strange physical shape, I could not have been more of an alien. I knew just how you thought of me, and it made me angry. So far as I knew, I was the normal man. It piqued me, that you should consider me so far beneath you. And yet, even then I had the temerity to think I might still make you care for me—but it was not long before I learned the truth. The day we were married——" he paused and passed his hand slowly over his brow—"I found out that day that you had other plans. That night—below, on the terrace—I think it must have been the madness of my thwarted hopes. I've never stopped regretting it. I took you in my arms and kissed you—debased by the brutality of my kiss the only woman I had ever loved—or could ever love."

A sound from the couch made him turn to look at her. She had sunk prone among the pillows, her head buried in her arms, and he saw that she was crying. They were tears of pity and compassion he knew, but they were none the less sweet to him on that account. In that moment she seemed to have reached the full perfection of lovely womanhood. And yet her emotion disturbed him strangely. In a moment he had fallen on his knees beside her, his hands seeking hers, all his love shining in his eyes, his deep voice sonorously pleading:

"Natalie, dear, look up at me. I did not mean to upset you so. It does not matter. I tried to keep it from you. When you were cruel to me it was easier.

It was your kindness, your sympathy and friendliness last night and to-day that disarmed me. Please, don't let me grieve you. I hoped I wouldn't do that, but I couldn't have spoken, if I had thought you were still indifferent, for I could not have borne your being merry over my misfortunes. It is something to me now to know that our new friendship will make you gentler in your thoughts of me. Forgive me. But I wanted you to know. I think perhaps it would have been better if I had let you know before. I will not trouble you after to-night. I'm going away from here in the morning——"

Her hand tightened in his, and her eyes, the more lovely for the tears they had shed, were raised to his. "No, no—you must not go. You have given me so much and I——"

"The tenderest flower of womanly sympathy. I will not give up the memory of those tears. They are more blessed than anything that can happen in my life. I'll never forget. They'll be with me always, to give me new heart for what I've got to do. I love you, Natalie—won't you let me tell you so again? I want you to learn by the tenderness of the touch of my fingers, by the look in my eyes. You felt them once, you looked in them once, when they were not gentle. See, I am barely holding the tips of your fingers. They tremble on mine so lightly that they might be gone, and I would scarcely know it. Do you understand now, what I mean? I am trying to show you that there is a love deep enough, reverent enough, to be content with spiritual rather than physical symbols."

He felt the warm fingers, to which he offered such gentle bondage, close more firmly, and make his own fingers prisoners, but her face was turned away from him again, and the moisture still hung on her lashes.

He rose, about to turn away, but she would not relinquish his hand, and stood beside him. In the eyes upturned to his, he saw a look which, for all his masculine incapacity, he understood. It was as though her tears had purified them, so that he had a new light on the spirit within. "Natalie——"

"What—Brooke?"

"Do you? C—could you?"

If he had been incredulous before, unready to believe his own happiness, the visible tokens of it were too obvious. In the next moment she was in his arms, and she no longer sought to evade him, A tear still trembled piteously on her cheek, but he kissed it away, and held her close to him, while he whispered the first words of real consecration of their union. He did not know what they were, nor did Natalie. She only knew that they were very sweet, and that here in his arms was sanctuary. The most curious thought they both had was that it was so wonderful that they were amazed they had never thought of it. He kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips, as he had done once before, but there was a difference now, for in the sweetness of their contact there was no bitterness. Nor was her face pale, as on that other night, or her lips cold. The blood rushed warmly, suffusing her face and throat with a lovely glow, as if it must give him, as words might not do, the message of her heart. Nor was there

any fear in her eyes. She did not try to speak, but he knew that her silence was only the herald of joy.

"When——" he urged at last, "when did this miracle happen?"

"Oh, long ago," she whispered.

"Long?"

"That night——" she stammered, "on the terrace."

"Natalie!"

"Yes, it is true. That night—I have never been able to forget it. You were brutal—but you were so—so strong—and I wondered what you would be like if you—you were gentle. I want to be mastered. Every woman does, down in her heart. She doesn't want to be worshipped from afar. She wants——"

"And yet, that's what I've been doing," he laughed.

"You're not very far now." She sank against his breast again, and the strong arm drew her closer.

"Nor will I ever be again. You want to be mastered? I will master you with tenderness. Your soul will never be your own again."

"I do not want it. It is yours. But do not treat it too kindly. It is sick now from spoiling. I want to try being unselfish. It will be a new sensation. I'm tired of going my own way. I want to go yours. Will you show me?"

"Will you like my ways?"

She put her hand over his. "I—I like some of them."

"My wife!"

Perhaps it was the mastery of his caress as he said the words, or her sudden recognition of his rights, for

she drew a little away from him, and, when he repeated it, would not look up in his eyes. He could not understand the sudden delicacy that came with the realization of their new relation. It was true, she was his wife, but in the months since their marriage the word had come to have a different meaning. She had borne his name and carried his image in her mind, but it had been an image merely, and not flesh and blood. His virility, the purely physical expression of his love, aroused a sudden diffidence and timidity. Instinctively she sought refuge in coquetry, and, gently disengaging his arms from around her, moved gently away.

"What is it, Natalie, dear?"

She threw herself on the couch, and motioned him to the chair, but he paid no attention to her gesture, and sank on the floor at her side, his eyes still questioning. "What is it, dear?"

"I was thinking that—that it is getting late."

He glanced at the clock. It was not yet twelve.

"Do you want me to go?"

"I don't want you to go, but——"

"What?"

"It seems so strange—that we had no engagement, no honeymoon. We were just—just married."

"Isn't that a reason why we should make up for lost time? Think how much every minute counts. There are only sixty of them in an hour, and you've already wasted three at least. I have so much to tell you —things that I've been thinking about and dreaming about, during all these long, weary months of hopelessness. I can't leave you now, Natalie, not yet. It is

so sweet—too sweet, almost, to last. I'm afraid if I leave you, you'll change your mind, or that I'll wake up in my own rooms and find that I've been dreaming. Only here, with my arms about you, and your eyes looking into mine, can I be sure that you are the real Natalie—real flesh and blood—my—wife."

Her eyes closed, and he kissed her as he liked, while her lips repeated:

"I am—your wife."

"Wife is a wonderful word. Love is a democrat, Natalie, dear. It sees no distinctions, knows nothing that isn't a part of itself. Its philosophy is absurdly simple."

"It has no philosophy," she murmured. "I'm glad it hasn't. I love you, Brooke."

"That is its philosophy—and this . . . and this . . ."

Alas for spiritual tokens! She lay in his arms, her eyes closed, her warm lips close to his, her womanhood reaching in that moment its consummation in surrender. But his triumph brought him only a divine tenderness and compassion. In that moment he understood the blessing of her lips, the discreet veil of her lashes, and the stillness of her body, which had relaxed in his arms.

"You must go now, Brooke," she said gently. "I want to be alone to—to think."

He lifted her to her feet, and kissed her gently on the brows.

"I must be in town in the morning. Will you be here when I come back? Will you? Are you sure? I'm still only half awake."

She went with him slowly, arm in arm, down the corridor—to the Door.

"Yes, go. It is better. I'm not quite sure yet that I understand it all. But I will wait for you, Brooke. I will wait for you."

He paused on the lintel of the door.

"Good night, dear. God bless you."

And she was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RIDING-CROP

TO NATALIE, it seemed a pity to sleep that night. She wanted to be awake and remember, for no dream could be so wonderful as the waking one. Love had come upon her suddenly, like a summer storm, and her heart was softly uplifted like a drooping blossom to the rain, though it still trembled with the memory of the thunderbolts. She had often seen love's counterfeit, and wondered if that was all love was. Now she knew, and wondered in turn, how she could have been so deceived in others or in herself. There was no mistaking it here. It was big, like his body; strong, like his spirit, and masterful, like his will. What else—who else mattered in the world?

It was nine in the morning when Natalie awoke. She lay very quiet for a moment, and then suddenly started up with a smile, as she remembered that it was the beginning of a new kind of day. She glanced at the clock, got up hurriedly, slipped on a negligee, and went down the corridor to his door, and listened. Then she knocked timidly, but there was no sound. He had gone. She went back and drew the curtains of her dressing-room windows, and peered out. The rain no longer fell, but the sky was overcast, the ground was soaked, and the dripping leaves hung listlessly from

twig and bough. The air was heavy with mist and dampness. Nature had wept, but there was no cheerful sun to dry her tears. It disappointed Natalie that the fair face of the earth should not be happy with her. Down that driveway, and into the dark patch of trees in the road outside the gates he had gone, and she had not been awake to wave him *au revoir*. She could see the mark of the tires in the sodden road, and for a while she sat and followed him with her thoughts. He had gone back to the little world of his own, of which she knew so little. She had an impulse to follow him, an eagerness to take some part in his serious projects, to which, she remembered jealously, he had always given the best that was in him. Memory brought her a vision of the cavernous building, with its pall of smoke and soot, the dark figures in the gloom, and the skeleton mass of the huge bulk on which they were working. They had signified something to her then, for to the idle there is a majesty in labor, but now she, too, was a part of his life, and she hungered for knowledge, that when he returned she might give him sympathy and understanding.

She turned away from the window with a sigh, which ended in a smile. The day would not be long. Nine—ten hours only, and he would be here, and perhaps to-morrow he would stay all day again. She rang for her maid, bathed, and dressed. It had always been her custom to breakfast in bed, but to-day marked the beginning of a new order of things. She would take breakfast every morning with him. He would wish it so.

She stopped at the hall table to glance at the mail—a letter from Nina De Witt, one from Réné De Land, and one from Lydia Van Sciver. She sorted them out of the pile of bills and circulars. A few days ago she would have opened and read them with avidity, for they were sure to contain the latest word from Vanity Fair, but she fingered them carelessly, all but De Land's, and put them aside. She tore open Réné's letter, and glanced over the first page, a curious kind of a smile on her lips. But she did not read further, and thrust the letter back in its envelope and put it with the unopened ones. Her own world, it seemed, had suddenly grown larger—or smaller—and there was no place in it just now for these messages. She had hoped to find a word from Brooke—yes, there it was. She tore the envelope eagerly. It was only a line, but the color came in her cheeks, and when she had read it, she thrust it happily into the bosom of her shirt-waist.

She was about to turn toward the breakfast room when her eye fell on the gold handle of a woman's riding-crop behind the Japanese bronze. She picked it up and looked at it. It was Abby Kempton's, of course. She remembered it perfectly. Abby had probably forgotten it when she had left "The Grange" in June. It was curious, though, that she had never had it sent on to Rhinebeck. Natalie put the stick down and went in to the table, but during her breakfast the thought of the riding-crop still lingered unpleasantly. She drank her coffee and read her letters, and when she had finished she sat a long while looking up at the

English portrait opposite her. The frown on her face deepened into a hard little knot, for she now remembered distinctly that Abby had sent her maid down to the hall to bring her crop when the trunks were being packed. With a quick resolution, Natalie put her foot on the bell beneath the table, and, when Bradley appeared, she questioned him carelessly.

"Mrs. Kempton left her riding-crop in the hallway, Bradley. Has she never sent for it?"

"No, Mrs. Garriott."

"Has it been here long?"

"A few days, ma'am. She left it in the breakfast room. I put it in the hallway."

"When was this?"

Bradley judicially stroked his chin. "I think it was —yes, Mrs. Garriott—the morning of the day you came home."

"She rode over here to call?"

"I don't know, ma'am. She and Mr. Garriott had ridden together that morning—they breakfasted here. Do you wish it sent to her, Mrs. Garriott?"

"Where is she visiting?"

"At Mrs. Schuyler's, I think, ma'am."

"Never mind. I'll send it. That will do, Bradley."

"Thank you, ma'am."

There was a lack of frankness about the whole matter which bothered her. What was the reason Brooke had not told her of his morning ride with Abby? Surely she had done nothing to discourage his confidences, and Abby—she thought it very curious that her husband had not mentioned the fact that Abby was in the neigh-

borhood. It seemed a little unfair, ungenerous of him, but she remembered in time how little thought they had had after his confession for anything but each other. Before that things had been different. The restraint he had put upon himself during all the long joyous day they had spent together had made all other things but impersonal discussions hazardous, and, of course, he had not wished to jeopardize the light of that day by any unnecessary shadows. She remembered, too, that Abby had been playing for some time past, with Natalie's tacit if not actual approval, the rôle of Good Samaritan, but since Natalie was now to play that part herself, the obtrusion of past conditions made her singularly intolerant of the woman who had taken her place. Abby had carried things with too high a hand. Natalie decided to send the crop to Mrs. Kempton at the Schuylers' with a note which would open the lady's eyes and clear the atmosphere.

With an effort she dismissed the matter from her mind, put on a hat, and went for a walk around the place. The clouds hung low over the water, and the sea mists obscured the horizon. The harbor was lead color, and the rising wind which came briskly from the east was flecking the Sound with gray. The craft at the foot of the hill tugged uneasily at their moorings, and the tree-tops crooned and swayed like mourners at a wake. To Natalie the scene was oppressive, so she went indoors, and up to her own rooms. Try as she might, she could not banish the thought of Abby Kempton. When the housemaid had kindled a wood-fire in her hearth and departed, she rang for Leontine.

She had a sense of stooping unworthily for her information, but she felt that the means were justifiable. She knew, too, that Leontine adored her, and that she was both sympathetic and reliable.

The sober air of her mistress apprised the maid of possible revelations, but she had her nation's love of mystery, and she stood silently expectant—her new suspicion of a change in the relations of her mistress and Mr. Garriott adding a new interest to the catechism.

"Mrs. Kempton breakfasted here Saturday morning, Leontine? You knew that?"

"*Oui*, madame," she said, smiling demurely. "Maids know everything."

"She rode with Mr. Garriott?"

"I am told so—horse-riding."

"Did Mr. Garriott take her back to Mrs. Schuyler's in the machine?"

"Oh, no, madame. He himself took her back by water —in the *Vas-y*."

"Do you know how she came over?"

Leontine shrugged her shoulders at the fireplace.

"No, madame. I do not know. I believe that nobody saw when she came."

"Did Mr. Garriott ride over for her in the early morning?"

"No; that could not be. The man in the stable brought the horses to the terrace. Mrs. Kempton was already here."

Natalie did not move, but her eyes burned more brightly as she looked at the fireplace.

"Natalie did not move, but her eyes burned more brightly."

"What time was that, Leontine?" she asked quietly.

"They said it was just at the sunrise." Leontine clapped her hands in a pretty gesture of supplication. "Pardon, madame, if I must tell you, but I do not know how Mrs. Kempton came here. No one knows, because she was already here very early in the morning, before any one was up. Mr. Garriott ordered the horses the night before. I am glad you have asked me, because the servants have talked. I think you should know."

Natalie's heart was like ice, but, outwardly calm, she asked a few more questions.

"What did Tibbott say?"

"Tibbott knows nothing. Mr. Garriott would not let him help him dress for dinner."

"Dinner?"

"Yes, Friday night; Mr. Garriott took the machine at seven."

"Tibbott didn't see him after that?"

"No, madame. Tibbott went to the servants' hall, where he could hear Mr. Garriott's bell, but he did not ring."

Natalie's face behind the backs of her clasped hands was invisible except for her eyes, and these gazed intently into the blaze.

"Thank you, Leontine. You may go now. If I want you, I will ring."

Natalie did not even hear her maid's footsteps or see the look, half curious, half sympathetic, which Leontine turned in her direction before she closed the door. Natalie sat for a long time staring into the fire, as the flames from the driftwood logs danced playfully up

the chimney. But while her eyes looked, they did not see. One might have thought she had turned into marble, so still she was, and so white. It seemed as if every drop of blood had gone from her body, and that she was incapable of motion or of thought. It seemed curious that what most engrossed her was the color in the flames. She had never noticed so much violet in flames before. After a while a spark from a falling piece of kindling sputtered and hissed on the tiles, and she changed her gaze long enough to look at it until it blackened and died. She was conscious of no unusual sensations of any kind, and this surprised her, for it seemed as though all the springs of emotion were dried at their sources, and that her heart was parched and dead in her breast. She wondered why she was so supine—dumbly content to sit and stare into the fire when every atom of her should be up in rebellion. It was Nature's safety device, a nice adjustment of mind and body which saved the weaker at the expense of the strong. But she knew that she must be suffering agonies of mortified pride and the bitterness of fallen idols. She tried not to believe, but the facts were stubborn. She put her head in her hands and pressed her fingers against her temples. What should she do? What should a woman do when all her gods are tumbled into the dust?

She remembered clearly now the first impression that had been formed in her mind when she had been first apprised of her husband's relations with Abby after the scene in the pavilion at the Gerry Schuylers' dance. The ardor of his kisses and Abby's breathless acquies-

cence had filled her with shame for herself and for the woman who had profited by her husband's weakness and his relations with herself. And yet, she had at some pains condoned their transgression as the harmless frolic of a gala night. Abby's letter had thrown her off her guard, too, and since then she had tried to think that most of his fault had its origin in her own imperious pride. She remembered now what Réné had said of those kisses, and the reasons he had given for Abby's refusal to accept her invitation to come with them for the cruise. Abby had stayed within reaching distance of New York so that she could be near Brooke Garriott. She saw it all now. "The leather apron of Vulcan"—what was that sentimental nonsense?—"a quiver for Cupid." This affair had been going on while she had been cruising on the coast—perhaps longer. Their understanding was so complete that it seemed now as though Abby had possessed him from the first. But *this*—they had indeed sunk low to come beneath her very roof, in her absence. What a simpleton she had been! What a credulous fool!

She got to her feet and strode back and forth, her blood surging hotly in angry shame. She did not hear the sound of an arriving motor in the drive or Leontine's first knock upon her door. But when the maid knocked again she composed her features and turned calmly.

"Come in," she said.

Leontine carefully closed the door behind her.

"It is Mrs. Kempton, madame. Are you at home?"

Natalie turned to her toilet table to hide the sudden

scorn which flitted across her features. What could Abby want here? Was her visit one of anxiety or merely the bravado of the guilty? Natalie's first impulse had been to deny herself to her visitor, but after a moment's hesitation she said quietly: "Tell her I will be down in a moment."

With great deliberation Natalie went to her dressing table and looked at herself in the glass. It was a blessing she had not wept. If she had wept she could not have gone down. She sprayed a handkerchief with an atomizer and brushed it a few times across her face, then pinched her pale cheeks until the color came, and when she left the room she was smiling.

Abby was sitting near the window rather formally in a straight-backed chair, but she arose when Natalie entered, and the two met in the middle of the rug with one of those feminine outbursts which have so impaired the value of adjectives—which mean nothing or much, usually much—but not what the adjectives mean. Each had something to learn, each something to conceal. Natalie's kiss hid scorn—Abby's uncharity, but Abby's was the more honest.

"Abby darling, *so* glad! How did you know I was home?"

"One of the Schuyler maids got it from your chauffeur. I came over at once. How perfectly sweet you look! Did you have a good cruise?"

"Splendid! I haven't forgiven you for not coming, though. What a smart hat! *Regnier's?* It becomes you so well."

Each thought the other looked fagged, but they were

not on terms which would warrant saying so. It was a meeting which on Natalie's part required the most discriminate sophistry. But Mrs. Kempton had less to lose, less to gain, so she could afford to be franker.

"Did you want me on the *Alicia?* I wasn't sure, after what had happened. I tried to write you what I felt about it—you know you brought it on yourself."

"Of course it didn't matter," said her hostess lightly. "Nor does it matter now. If Mr. Garriott prefers your society to mine, that's all we need say about it. By the way, did you know you left your crop here?"

She asked the question with a sudden access of sweetness which was meant to disarm, but overshot the mark. Abby colored.

"Yes, I missed it. I suppose Brooke told you of our ride."

"No, curiously enough, he didn't. I don't suppose he thought it necessary. It was very good of you to take pity on his loneliness."

Abby looked up at her quickly. However lightly the words had been uttered, intuition, sharpened by self-consciousness in the visitor, discovered the sting her hostess would have kept concealed. But Abby answered gently.

"He was looking very badly. I made him come up to Habberton. The Schuylers wanted him, but he chose to come here."

"Yes, I know," said Natalie. And then with a slightly bored movement. "It was very nice of you, Abby. It's been so hot in town. I don't mind it the least."

"Don't you? I was beginning to fancy you did."

"I? Why do you think so?"

"I hadn't expected to be greeted so cordially. You have no right to appear so glad to see me. I don't think that you can deceive me nearly so easily as you can other people. I remember a feeling of disappointment, too, when you asked me on the *Alicia*."

"Disappointment?"

"Yes. That you could think I wouldn't guess you didn't want me."

"Why shouldn't I have wanted you?"

"For the same reason you don't want me here now."

Natalie uttered a word of protest, but Mrs. Kempton would not listen.

"Oh, I know," she went on. "I don't misunderstand. Friendship is instinctive but calm. Enmity only is demonstrative. You are trying too hard."

Natalie faced her visitor squarely, her tones cool and abrupt.

"Well?"

"Thanks," smiled Abby. "Now I'm sure I know how I stand. It was really necessary for me to know on Brooke's account as well as my own."

"Brooke's?"

"Yes, dear," sweetly. "Because if you're angry at me, I know you're fond of Brooke."

The shot told. With a frown Natalie tossed her head and looked past Mrs. Kempton out of the window.

"That doesn't follow," she said. "There are other things that might make friendship between us hazardous."

"Perhaps," said the visitor, with a show of gayety; "but I can't think of them. We got along famously until you were married. We'd get along still, if you took a sensible view of things. Unless a woman wants her husband for herself, it's sheer selfishness to try to deprive other people of him."

"I don't want him," said Natalie in a stifled tone. "Mr. Garriott and I are no nearer to-day than when we were married."

She spoke without knowing what she said, except that it should be something to combat an idea that now seemed so odious to her, marveling all the time at the superb audacity of her visitor, who, she could plainly see, hoped by throwing Natalie on the defensive to improve her own position. She was still further surprised when Abby shook her head in negation.

"You can't deceive me, Natalie dear. I think I've known it all along. You didn't want to love your husband, but you do now, whether you want to or not. You may think what you like of my visit, but I came on a message of peace—to try to bring you together if I can. He's mad about you—he has always been."

"Has he told you so?" asked Natalie scornfully.

"One doesn't have to be told what is so plainly written that any one may read—every one but the one it is written for."

"*You* want to bring us together? *You!* I don't think I understand. Really, Abby, you've surely underrated my intelligence. Or perhaps you're so sure of him yourself that you're running no risks in this unnatural generosity."

"Yes," Abby continued steadily. "That is it. I *am* sure of him. I wish I might always be so sure of everything as I am of Brooke. He hasn't a thought for any other woman in the world but you."

Natalie did not reply at once, but regarded her visitor tolerantly. She had not yet fathomed her intentions, and the object of her visit was still a mystery. It did not occur to Natalie for a moment to believe what she said. She had long known that in certain ways Abby was much cleverer than she was, and, in searching for the motive for her visit, it came to her that by bridging the gap between husband and wife Abby hoped to escape the consequences of her own folly. And that plan meant that Natalie was to play the complaisant wife—and Jack Kempton the complaisant husband. They would make a pleasant kind of family party, like the De Witts and Tommy McCall. It only remained for Abby to win her friendship again to make the plan a success.

Mrs. Garriott laughed rudely. "And you? Doesn't he think of you any more?"

"Yes—no more, no less than he has always done." And then soberly: "He is, I think, the best friend I have in the world. It's a pity people should have thought anything else."

"You gave them cause."

"Yes—I'm sorry."

There was a dignity in her quiet tone, but it was lost on Natalie, who saw in Mrs. Kempton's contrition only the ruse of a clever woman who plays to win at any cost.

"You are sorry?" she laughed again. "You'll forgive me if I seem a little surprised at that."

Mrs. Kempton raised her eyes to those of her hostess, for her voice was very cold, very quiet, and her face was set in lines that made her look years older than she was. "You are sorry?" she went on, carelessly bitter, "and yet you come to my house in my absence and spend the night here alone with my husband. Is that your idea of penitence?"

Abby started up, her eyes wide, and extended both hands between them as though warding off a blow.

"Natalie!" she cried hoarsely, "how could you?"

Natalie had risen, too, and stood facing her, while she went on pitilessly.

"It is true. You must have been out of your wits to think I shouldn't have learned of it. They say custom makes for fancied security. Were you obliged to come here? Surely you might have made some arrangement——"

"Stop!—I will not listen."

"You must. You thought that by riding with my husband, breakfasting with him, by eating my food, using my servants, you could disarm suspicion. You came to this house by night. No one saw you enter it. But you were here. There seems to be no secret about that. And you were seen to go out at six in the morning." She paused for breath, and then added: "Perhaps you'd like to explain."

Abby stared at her hostess, pale and disturbed at the heartlessness of her indictment. And as she looked, an expression very like horror came into her eyes. Then

her eyes wavered, and she sank into her chair again and put her hands to her head, trying to think. No one had seen her enter the house. That was true. If Natalie chose to believe what the servants said, there was no way of disproving it. No one had seen them leave Long Point in the *Vas-y*, because the Schuylers' servants were not abroad at dawn, nor had the servants at "The Grange" witnessed their disembarkation. There had been no one about but the groom and he—yes, Brooke had taken her in and given her some sherry and a biscuit. She remembered that she had felt cold after driving over in the motor-boat. The groom had seen them come out on the terrace. Her own maid—no, Josephine was ill with a headache, and had been dismissed for the evening. She realized with dismay that the chain of circumstances was complete if Natalie chose to believe them.

"It's a pity I came home so soon, Abby dear," Mrs. Garriott went on icily. "I wouldn't have disarranged your plans for the world, especially after they had been so adroitly made."

Mrs. Kempton lifted her head at last, and got to her feet again.

"Do you believe—really believe——" she stammered. Natalie was adjusting her hair with studied calmness in the mantel mirror. She shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"I don't see that I have any choice. Do you deny it?"

Mrs. Kempton rose from her chair with a dignity that was more than a match for Natalie's indifference,

then gathered up her gloves and the riding-crop, which Natalie had laid conspicuously on the table.

"No," she said quietly, "I deny nothing. I was here at six in the morning. Think what you choose of it. I rode with Brooke and breakfasted here. I'm glad I did. I should do it again if he asked me. You can't understand a man who is clean like Brooke. You don't deserve him. Good-by."

And before Natalie could speak again, with a flushed face, she had passed through the door with rapid footsteps, and out to the terrace and her waiting conveyance. Natalie listened to the sharp tap of her footfall in the hallway and on the flagging outside. Then she went up to her room and rang for Leontine.

CHAPTER XXIII

BROKEN PILLARS

GARRIOTT had left word with Tibbott to call him at six o'clock, and by seven he had had his breakfast and was on his way in the machine to Habberton station. The air was chill, and now and then a gust of rain broke against the curtains and fogged the glass wind-shield. But no gloom without could cast its pall over the brightness that glowed within. He did not know that it rained, for there was nothing but sunshine in his heart. To him the world was in its Easter morning.

"I will be out on the four-twenty, Etienne. Tell Mrs. Garriott."

The name had a new sound, and he uttered it with a confident ring of possession. He would have liked to cry it from the roof of the station, so that every one might hear, but just then the train came rumbling in, and he got aboard, without even thinking to get the morning paper. He did not care to know about other people's affairs. It was much more interesting to him to think about his own. It was a drab city to which he was returning, but in his heart was a memory of old rose and ivory, and the rest of the world did not matter. He reached the shop a little after eight. When

he came in, O'Dowd looked up at him with a wolfish grin, which had in it something of reproach. This was no time, it said, to be chasing butterflies. Garriott's happiness was reflected in his radiant face, as in a mirror, and so O'Dowd greeted him with brief cordiality.

"Have a good time? You're lookin' better. We've got to work, though, now. The parts came in from the foundry and machine shop last night, and we're ready to assemble. Besides, there's a million letters on your desk, and the car company called up already this mornin'. They want to arrange for a test Saturday, and we haven't spun a wheel yet."

"They'll have to wait," said Brooke, the cloud of business affairs gathering in his face. "Do you think we can manage it?"

"At a pinch. It depends on what happens here. Everything seems to be all right, but we can't tell without the power."

Garriott flew up the stairs, two steps at a time, ran hurriedly over his mail, then called up the car company and told them he would let them know before the shop closed if he could keep his appointment. When he came down again, O'Dowd had begun putting the machinery together. And soon Brooke was so deeply engrossed in his work that he lost all sense of the flight of time. O'Dowd was a good mechanic, but, like most men of practical training, had no imagination. He used to say: "What I want is facts—just you '*show me*,' Brooke. I'll see it, if you've got the goods." Brooke *had* "shown him" how the Garriott engine could be used

in a brewery-wagon, and he was about to show him what it would do with a street-car. But O'Dowd was crotchety and nervous. Brooke had promised him substantial profits if the deal with the car-line went through, and he sensed difficulties where none existed. But his chief saw no chance of failure. What he had done with the truck had demonstrated that success here was only a matter of modified forms in applying the same principles; and this morning nothing could check Garriott's enthusiasm or his optimism. He was surer of himself and of his machinery than he had ever been. So he only laughed at O'Dowd, and in the moments when his mind was not busy thought of Natalie. It was not until lunch-time that he realized that he had not learned how the market was going. He sent Salotti out for a pint of milk, a bun, and the morning paper, and went up to the office. He had been living all the morning in happy anticipation of a chat over the 'phone with Natalie, and he wondered what she would have to say to him. He had some difficulty in getting the wire to "The Grange," but at last Bradley's voice answered.

"Is that you, Bradley?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is Mr. Garriott. Is Mrs. Garriott there?"

"Yes, sir. I think so, sir."

"Will you tell her I would like to speak to her?"

"Yes, sir. Just hold the wire a minute, sir."

Brooke waited. On the desk before him was the paper of yesterday afternoon. He had not cared yesterday what had happened to the world. He had been

living in Arcadia. But his eyes caught a heading, in black-face type, which startled him.

ALARMING CONDITIONS IN THE FINANCIAL WORLD—CLINTON TRUST COMPANY CLOSES ITS DOORS.

He caught up the paper, the receiver still at his ear, and hurriedly read the summary of the news:

"Officers of the Trust Company make statements—embarrassment only temporary—depositors besiege doors—police preserving order."

That was Natalie's trust company, stock in which composed the greater part of the Judson estate, and he had a sense of guilt that he had not kept himself informed about her business affairs. Perhaps she had not seen the papers. It would not do to tell her about it—not yet, until he could learn the facts at first hand from Northrop, but the information astounded him, for the Clinton's stock had always run in high figures, until the panic came, and the decline in its quotations a few days ago might have been explained by the unusual conditions in the Street. Very much astounded, he heard the telephone click, and Bradley's voice again.

"Mrs. Garriott is engaged, sir," it said.

That was curious. Brooke thought he had misunderstood.

"Mrs. Garriott is not in?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. She is in the house, but she asked me to say that she is engaged, sir."

The monotonous repetition of the phrase maddened him, and he answered impatiently.

"See her again; at once, Bradley. It is Mr. Garriott. Did you understand?"

"Yes, I understood, sir. I gathered that she could not come to the telephone, sir."

"Oh, well. Tell her I will hold the wire and wait until she can speak to me."

He awaited the man's return eagerly, and a little worried. Could she be ill?

"I have seen Mrs. Garriott," came the monotonous voice again. "She asks me to repeat the former message. She is engaged, sir."

"There is nothing more?"

"Nothing more, sir."

Brooke snapped the receiver into its bracket viciously, and regarded the instrument with a malevolent eye. Surely there was some mistake. Had Bradley suddenly taken leave of his senses? The repetition of the phrase had an ugly sound, and Bradley would have fared badly if he had been within reach. But it was no time to waste his brain in idle conjectures, while Natalie's fate for the future seemed to hang in the balance. He had taken two or three turns up and down the room, when Salotti entered with his lunch and an early edition of an afternoon paper. He put the milk bottle and bun on his desk, and seized the paper eagerly. The first words that met his eye were the red scareheads of a sensational journal:

TRUST COMPANY PRESIDENT A SUICIDE.
EDWARD HALIBURTON BLOWS OUT
HIS BRAINS.

He read on, Natalie's peril (and his own) now desperately convincing:

"Officers Unable to Give Accurate Statement of Trust Company's Affairs—Failure Believed to Have Been Caused by Speculations of Its President—Ontario, Consolidated Roller Bearing Company, American Storage Battery and Columbia and Brazil Steamship Lines, All Fail——"

There was no use reading more. Those companies were all Haliburton concerns, and it was clear that the worst was to be expected with regard to the Judson estate. Not even the strongest opponents of the administration in power, who believed that insensate investigation of corporate interests had brought about the depression in business, had ever predicted such a disastrous failure as this was likely to prove. The Clinton was an "old line" trust company, on whose board of directors sat men with names known throughout the country, and whose interests extended from one end of the city to the other. Brooke knew what this failure meant, not only to Natalie and himself, but to the whole financial system of which Haliburton was a part, the nerves and fibers of which ran in every direction, with their motor centers in Wall Street. How was it to affect the plans for his work? The officers of the Cross-Town line had assured him some weeks ago that

money for the new cars and truck would be forthcoming on the successful completion of his trials; but then there had been no rumors of such a disaster as this!

It seemed that his career had reached its greatest crisis. Success and failure faced him, side by side. Which was it to be? A living for himself was already assured, but a living for him did not mean a living for Natalie. Even if the truck did not come up to the requirements of the Cross-Town line, he would still have enough from the freight wagon and ventilating machinery to give him a small income. But how could he ask Natalie to live upon that? It was too severe a test of her love for him. Perhaps she had read of it by this time. Could her knowledge of the bad news of the day have had anything to do with Bradley's strange message?

Hazards hung thick about his affairs, material and sentimental. He quietly read the report in the paper through to the end, then got up and paced the floor slowly, his brows in a deep tangle. Then, with set lips and a look of final decision, he took up the telephone again, and made an appointment with Mr. Northrop, then washed, and got into his street clothes.

As he went down into the shop, O'Dowd eyed him dubiously.

"I've got to go out, Jim."

"See here, Brooke. This ain't *my* motor. I'm not going it alone——"

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

"Will you be back?" asked the mechanic.

"No. You've got to do without me to-day. I'll be

in to-morrow. If she runs by six, 'phone the car company. They want to keep posted."

O'Dowd took off his cap, scratched his head, and watched Brooke's figure darken the doorway. Then he turned to the engine again, muttering: "She ain't a-goin' to run right. I know it. There'll be trouble in that sawed-off generator, as sure as God made little apples."

Then he spat laconically. "Oh, hell!" he finished, with a growl.

Brooke hurried westward, torn between the importance of his own project and the greater importance of his visit to Mr. Northrop. He was shown immediately into that gentleman's private office, and the demeanor of the old lawyer had little in it to reassure him.

"Come in, Mr. Garriott—sit down," he said wearily. "It's a very bad business for us all. I 'phoned Mrs. Garriott this morning, but it was impossible to get her to the wire. Is she ill, do you know?"

"No," said Garriott. "I saw her last night. I don't think she can understand the importance of your message."

"She has not seen the papers?"

"Not since yesterday morning. There were nothing but rumors then. Tell me what you know of the whole wretched business."

Mr. Northrop picked up a glass paper-weight and twisted it slowly in his fingers.

"As counsel for the Judson estate, I am placed in a delicate position. Perhaps I should preface my re-

marks by saying that I have lost personally about fifty thousand dollars—very nearly all my capital. Mr. Coburn, Haliburton's co-executor in the Judson estate, has lost more—I don't know how much. He had the most implicit confidence in Haliburton, and the developments of the last few days have mystified us all. The president of the Clinton had always enjoyed Coburn's fullest confidence. Coburn, Haliburton and Judson, as you know, all came from the same town out in Ohio. All three succeeded. Coburn was a worker, and Judson was lucky. Haliburton was both. He rose from a clerkship in a bank down town to a commanding figure in the world of finance. He had always been known as a progressive man, but he was in the closest confidence of the powers, with whom he was frequently called into conference." He waved his hand deprecatingly. "You know all this, of course, Mr. Garriott," he continued. "What you didn't know, and what neither I nor Coburn knew until yesterday, was his use of trust company's funds for purposes of speculation. It seems the decline in *Ontario*, in which he was heavily interested, had knocked his supports from under him, and he faced disaster. He did not dare at such a time as this to seek aid from Howarth, Garrison, or any of the other big men, because he had gone into the *Ontario* project without their knowledge or advice. It was not the sort of thing either of them would have touched, even in the best of times. The steady decline in the share market and the news from Washington, which hit most of the New York institutions pretty hard, upset all Haliburton's plans, and, as the days passed, I

suppose he saw all chance of restitution of the money he had borrowed go a-glimmering. He did what other men have done—lost his head, and went in deeper—hoping by a lucky turn at least to save his reputation, if not his fortune.

"He lost everything—his own money, his wife's, and other funds entrusted to his care. The Street got the news of his position, and his stocks were hammered steadily, until the bottom was knocked out of them. He killed himself. I suppose there was really nothing left for him to do. It has been a great shock to us all. Coburn is prostrated, and nobody knows yet how bad a smash it is. It doesn't matter so much about me. I've only told you of my loss to show you how we were kept in ignorance of the company's affairs."

"What is to be done?"

"A receiver will be appointed to-morrow. The examiners and accountants will be at work on the books to-night. Until they get through, there is no way of telling what the company can pay. I have talked with two members of the board, but I can't say they gave me very much hope."

"Did Haliburton use the other securities—the railroad stock which Mrs. Garriott still owned?"

"That, I am glad to say, is safe. I learned so this morning. There are others who are not so fortunate. These are trying times, Mr. Garriott, trying times."

The old man got up out of his chair and walked to the window. He seemed suddenly to have grown years older. He was a man of limited abilities and moderate means, and the loss of this considerable sum had broken

him badly. As counsel for the estate, of course, Northrop had no financial responsibility in connection with its administration, and his own loss clearly acquitted him of any knowledge or complicity in the acts of Edward Haliburton. Garriott felt sorry for him. All the grandiloquent inflections which so amused Natalie were gone, and in the window stood only a tired old man, looking out over the short perspective of weary years that remained to him.

"What do you think I had better do?" asked Brooke quietly. "I'm going down to Habberton. What shall I tell my wife?"

Northrop faced him wearily.

"I'm afraid, Garriott, you'd better tell her the truth."

"Yes, but what is the truth? Will the Clinton stock be worthless?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. There will be something left, of course."

"But not enough to warrant her living on the present scale?"

"I don't think anything ever warranted that," said the old man severely. "I've told her so."

"Will it be necessary to sell 'The Grange' or the city house?"

"I don't know. Come in to-morrow. We should know more then."

"Would you advise me to call on Mr. Coburn?"

"He would not see you. Leave the matter to me."

"But he is culpable. As executor, he should have known——"

"No, no. You're mistaken. He has taken nothing, or permitted Haliburton to use anything which required his signature. He is no more culpable than the other members of the directorate, and his financial responsibility is no greather than theirs. The fault all lay with one man. That man is dead."

"Do you realize," asked Garriott gravely, after a pause, "what this means to my wife?"

"Yes," said Northrop. "It means to her just what it means to me. The only difference is," he added, "that she is younger than I am."

Garriott rose and took the lawyer's hand.

"I'm sorry, sir. I suppose Mrs. Garriott will get along. There will be enough for her to live on. I hope 'The Grange' will not have to go, that's all."

"Let's hope for the best," the old man muttered. "I will keep you advised."

There was nothing to be gained here, so Garriott, with a last word of commiseration, took up his hat and went.

Purely physical difficulties always stimulated Garriott's mind to renewed activity, but by the time he had reached the street he was sure that the problems he now faced were burdened with more unpleasant possibilities than any in his experience. How the loss of Natalie's fortune was to affect their own relations, was difficult to determine. Last night he would have said that, for richer or poorer, she would have been willing to share whatever life had to offer with her husband. Now, out of her sight, without the reassurance of her presence, he felt a doubt. A few hours out of all the

hopeless months he had known her were all he had to judge her by. Walking rapidly, he made his way to Thirty-fourth Street. He wanted time to think it out for himself, and chose the side streets where there was small chance of his meeting people he knew. It was unpleasant information that he was bringing her, and his heart was filled with pity. The failure of the trust company meant the loss of the social prestige which was so much to her, for, unless he could provide, there would not be money enough for her to take part in the expensive diversions of the people of her set; it meant the sale of the house in Fifty-sixth Street, and probably of "The Grange." He tried to imagine her living with him in a "model suburb" or in a stuffy apartment in a neighborhood of noisy children.

The future? Yes, the future smiled. To Garriott the future had always smiled. He had always been sure that some day he would win his way to big achievements. He was sure now he was on the right track, but there might be many a long year between the promises of the day and their actual fulfillment.

He had practically nothing to offer her but his shares in the Motor Truck Company, some of which she already owned. Perhaps, together, they would have $6,000 a year. He smiled bitterly when he thought that Natalie had probably spent more than that during the month of July. And yet—why should money matter? His own love for her was not a thing that could be measured in dollars. How was it with

her? He recalled some of the things she had said to him last night, when she was in his arms, and the future had seemed secure. "Do not treat me too kindly. I am sick from spoiling. I want to try being unselfish. It will be a new sensation. I'm tired of going my own way. I want to go yours." Was that only the confession of the bored child of good fortune, or would it stand the test of adversity? He hurried on toward the ferry, his head down, torn between fear and hope. What else had she said? "She wanted to be mastered." That, too, might be the easy hyperbole of discontent, but it seemed if there was to be any chance for them in the future it lay in the hope that he might be able to show her the way. He drew new strength from the very thought of what was to be required of him. He saw as if by an inspiration that their relations were simplified by the loss of Oliver Judson's money, and he was almost ready to rejoice that fortune had suddenly made her so dependent on him.

As good sometimes grows out of evil, Edward Haliburton's failure had brought them back to the simple, elemental conditions under which a little love may fail, but a great love can only grow greater. That was as it should be between a woman and a man. His mission was to provide, hers to love and to trust. He was sure enough of himself; he would have loved and married her anywhere, in any condition of life in which he had found her, and face life gladly with her, from the bottom rung of the ladder, if it had been necessary. He had gone up several steps in the past few years, but it was still a long way to the top. Would Natalie look

as he looked—toward the goal—or would she only be willing to look back at the little distance which he had gone?

He was still doubtfully debating the matter when the train reached Habberton station, but when he got down he found that there was no machine waiting for him. He walked the platform, thinking that perhaps his orders had been misunderstood, and at last got into one of the rickety station wagons, and set out for "The Grange." The road was rough, the horse aged, and the driver loquacious, and, though Brooke answered him in monosyllables, and at last relaxed into sullen silence, the man continued to talk of the panic in the city with the casual omniscience of the persistent reader of the sensational newspaper, quoting the very journal Garriott had read, its extravagances and inaccuracies, until Brooke's overwrought nerves could stand it no longer.

"I hired you to drive me home. Now, d—n you, shut up."

The man turned a startled glance at the set face of his fare, and relapsed into an awed silence.

As they passed into the driveway, Garriott looked in vain for any signs of life about the place. Handing the driver a bill, without waiting for change, he got down and hurried up to the door.

Bradley met him.

"I'm sorry, sir, about the motor car. Mrs. Garriott took the chauffeur to town with her, just after lunch."

"Mrs. Garriott has gone to town?"

"Yes, sir. She went away leaving no orders, sir, except to give you this note."

Hiding his chagrin from the servant, he took the note and went upstairs to the study, where he locked the door and tore open the envelope. Within was a hurried scrawl.

"I have unfortunately discovered the uses to which you put 'The Grange' in my absence. In the future, when you come into it, I go out. I hope you will make no effort to find me, for I will not see you or talk with you—*ever.* N. J. G."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SAMARITAN

GARRIOTT read the note again and again, in dismay, then bewilderment and incomprehension. "The uses to which you have put 'The Grange' "—what uses? The real meaning of the words came slowly, and when they did he laughed aloud. Abby Kempton! Of course, the note meant nothing else. But he grew sober at once, as he wondered who had been guilty of the mischief. The suspicion would have been almost amusing if it had not been so unjust. Poor Abby, it seemed, was doomed to take the center of the stage in every false situation, but he could not understand at once what chain of circumstances could have linked her to such a cruel report. Frowning angrily, he strode abruptly to the extension phone in the hall, called up "Long Point," and asked if he could speak to Mrs. Kempton.

"Yes, she was there."

"Would she come to the phone?"

After keeping him waiting awhile, the butler returned with the message that Mrs. Kempton was indisposed and could not speak to Mr. Garriott. Brooke dropped the receiver into its bracket viciously. He seemed to be balked at every turn.

Then he rang for Bradley, who entered suavely, his face loftily observant. His urbanity infuriated Garriott, who controlled himself with an effort.

"You answered my telephone from town?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir."

"What did Mrs. Garriott say to you?"

"Nothing but what I told you, sir. She was busy in her rooms, Mr. Garriott—I think, sir, getting her trunks packed."

"That was about twelve o'clock?"

"I think so, sir."

"Did Mrs. Garriott have any callers in the morning?"

Bradley hesitated. He seemed to be debating where his duty lay—in loyalty to his mistress, or duty to his master. But Mr. Garriott decided the matter by repeating the question sharply.

"Answer me!" he insisted.

"Y—yes, sir. Mrs. Kempton called, sir."

"Mrs. Kempton!"

"Yes, sir. That was at about eleven, I think."

The mystery deepened. In what way was Abby Kempton's visit connected with the departure of his wife? It was clear that something had happened during her visit to cause the sudden upheaval in his household. And yet, according to his knowledge of the woman, Abby Kempton was the last person in the world from whom he might have expected an unfriendly act. Bradley still stood before him, shuffling his feet uneasily. Garriott searched the man's face keenly.

It was dull and a little frightened, but apparently he had told the truth.

"Very good, Bradley. Order a horse and break-cart for me, at once. I'm going out."

The coachman drove with all speed through the gathering darkness to the Schuylers', and Brooke sent up a card, on which he had written: "You are the only one in the world who can help. Won't you see me?"

He waited interminably, but at last she appeared. Her eyes were unnaturally large, her cheeks pale, and in her hand she carried a bottle of smelling salts. She gave him her hand listlessly, and sank on the divan.

"I had determined not to see you—not to see you again," she began.

"Tell me what has happened," he urged anxiously, seating himself beside her. "What has happened to you—to Natalie—to us all?"

Mrs. Kempton's eyes sought the wall opposite. "I didn't want to talk about it. It's not very pleasant. I called on Natalie to help her make peace with you—to try and see if there wasn't some way to bring you together—and met the fate of the peacemaker——"

"Yes, yes."

"To be brief, she accused me of unutterable things—with you—at 'The Grange'——" She stopped in shame.

"She couldn't have meant it," he blurted forth.

"Oh, yes, she did. She was dreadfully in earnest. It seems, my dear Brooke——" she gave a hard little laugh—"it seems we were not careful enough."

"Don't, Abby, don't. It was cruel of her. I can't understand——"

"I fancy," she went on more quietly, "that Natalie had been talking to her servants. I forgot my riding-crop the other morning. Stupid of me, wasn't it? Natalie found it. Hence, my damnation."

"Didn't you explain?"

"No," she said scornfully. "If she can think so badly of me, let her. I wouldn't deny it—I'd be putting myself on the same plane with her informant. Besides, curiously enough, I couldn't have explained it if I'd wanted to."

"Couldn't?"

"No. There wasn't a soul downstairs when I left Long Point. I had set an alarm, and I dressed myself."

Garriott frowned. "That's awkward," he said. "The fellow that brought up the horses——"

"He was waiting for us at the terrace, when we came out of the house. I was cold, and you had given me a drink. Don't you remember?"

"I had not thought of that," he said uneasily.

"You can understand now, why I was stricken dumb."

He looked soberly down, but made no reply. He raised his eyes, to find Mrs. Kempton softly laughing.

"Oh, don't worry," she laughed. "I can prove my alibi if I like. Carol Schuyler was up with one of the children, and saw me from the window, in riding-togs, going down the path to the pier. I shouldn't have known, but I had some curiosity—mostly on Jack's account—so I made inquiries when I got back."

She was amused at the great sigh of relief which, in spite of himself, escaped him.

"If you could only have told her that this morning!"

Mrs. Kempton sank back on the couch, and threw out her arms, with a gesture of utter weariness. "What is the use? I have tried so hard to help her. She's stubborn—selfish—suspicious. I'm tired of being misunderstood. I give her up."

Brooke had taken her hand and held it firmly in both of his own. She tried to withdraw it, and turned away from him, but he would not let her go.

"You mustn't say that. You can't give her up now."

He did not know how to tell her, but she could see that he was suffering.

"Did you quarrel again?" she asked.

"She has left 'The Grange'."

"I'm sorry," she said coolly. "It is very unfortunate. She deserves nothing better."

The words were bitter, and to Brooke sounded singularly heartless.

"Don't, Abby. Things are going very badly for Natalie. She will need every friend she has in the world."

"What do you mean?"

"The Clinton Trust Company failed yesterday. In its stock was almost every dollar of Oliver Judson's fortune."

She turned to him now, with a new and lively expression of sympathy.

"Oh! How terrible! I did not know of that. What will she do? Poor Natalie! Oh, I am really sorry—so very sorry for you both."

"It doesn't matter to me."

After a pause she asked: "Does she know yet?"

"I'm afraid not. I was relying on you to comfort her, to help her. For all her pride, she's very much of a child. I dread to think of her learning the truth away from home."

"It is awfully sad. I can't seem to get used to the idea. Natalie is so dependent on creature comforts. I wish I could do something."

"You can," he said soberly. "I want you to help me find her."

"How can I?"

"You must. Last week, perhaps, it would not have mattered, but now—it is urgent now."

He drew a deep breath before he went on. "You have suffered the fate of the peacemaker, Abby, but you've been successful in making peace."

Her eyes sought his in inquiry, but he would not meet them. "Yesterday," he went on, his gaze lowered, "the day before—we were friends. Last night——" his voice sank to a lower key—one she understood at once. "Last night, I took your advice, and told her—I told her I loved her."

Mrs. Kempton's voice wavered a little, as she asked: "And she?"

"She gave herself to me," he whispered, "for better—for worse. Now you know why I must find her. My place is with her. I don't know what des-

perate thing she may do, when she learns that all she has in the world is what I can give her."

Abby Kempton had risen, and was leaning over the piano, her fingers pressed hard against her throbbing temples. He got up and went over to her, but she waved him away.

"No—don't come near me, Brooke, please. Stay where you are. I can help you better if you will leave me alone for a few minutes. I must think out for myself—by myself."

He stood in the middle of the rug in front of the mantel, arms folded, brows bent, regarding her. There was something inexpressibly pathetic in the bowed head and bent shoulders—something unfamiliar in the slimness of her small figure, which, in the clinging negligee she wore, seemed to droop wearily to the support of her arms. Yet even then, he could not understand the exact nature of her emotions, and watched her tolerantly, wondering in a dull way, what it all meant. At last she turned abruptly, her face calm and her lips curled in her curious little crooked smile.

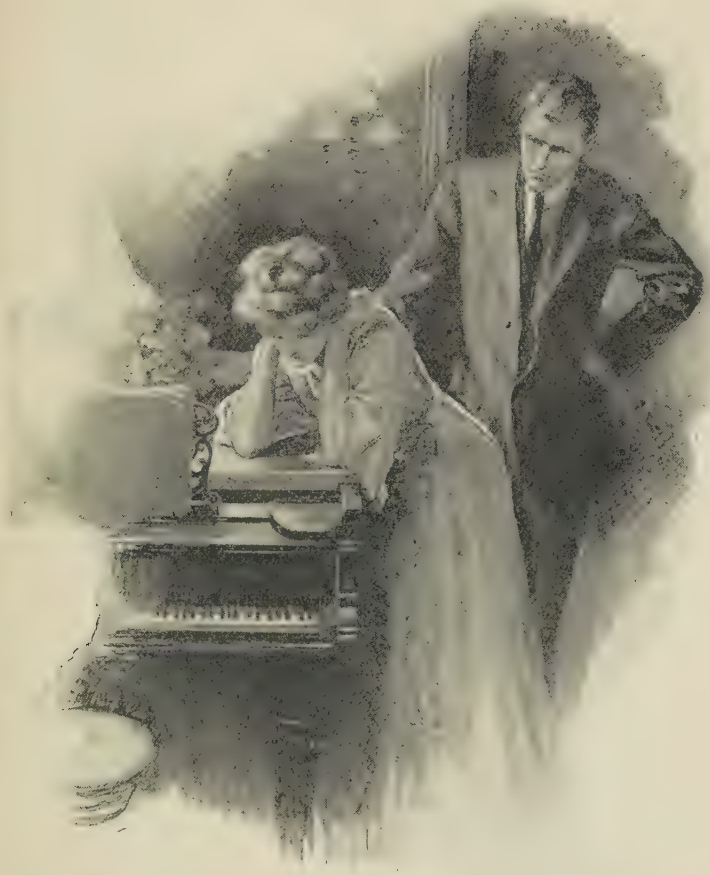
"Why do I always do everything you want me to? Your wife insults me—and——"

"She was foolish—angry."

"Yes—and jealous. I tried to make her so. At last I succeeded. But I hadn't counted the cost."

"Forgive her, Abby."

"I'm trying to, but it isn't easy," she said slowly.

"You must. Besides, you don't want her to think—what she does of you—do you?"

"Abby Kempton had risen and was leaning over the piano, her fingers pressed hard against her throbbing temples."

"Oh, I don't care in the least—not on Natalie's account. She has hurt me all she can. I think I can stand almost anything now. But there is another person to be considered. Instead of being a trio, we are now a quartette. Jack is openly mutinous. He and Bertha have quarrelled, and he's coming here to-night to take me home."

"Are you going?"

"I don't know," she murmured. "I think I shall. It seems that, so far as you are concerned, my mission in life is ended."

"You must not say that, Abby. I won't have it. You can't throw me off like this."

"Oh, I know," she insisted. "My usefulness is impaired. After what has happened between—between you two—Natalie and I can never be the same to each other again. I don't want to be unkind, but I feel sure that it is better so. You are going away from here to find Natalie. I am going to help you, and she will come back with you to the 'Grange'—to-morrow, perhaps. But when she comes into your life again, I go out of it—permanently. Oh, I'm not deceiving myself, and I don't want you to be deceived. Brotherhoods of Consolation—call them by whatever name you choose—between youthful persons of opposite sex are precarious. You and I have done admirably, Brooke." She was smiling down at him, with a kind of maternal benediction. "I doubt if any two other persons in the world, placed as we were, could have done so well. But to-night, we are going to part company."

He sat deep in the cushions, staring at the floor. "I'd like to know how you are going to keep me away."

"I'm not going to try. You won't seek me, that's all."

"I will," he said doggedly. "I'll never give you up."

She laughed at him. "For a week you'll mourn me, for two you'll think kindly of me, but in a month you'll forget that such a person ever existed."

Her assertion, he thought, did not merit the dignity of a reply. She rose, leaving him sitting there, glowering at the rug, and walked slowly up and down before him.

"Now," she said cheerfully, "you are going to find Natalie."

"How?" he muttered.

"By following my instructions. Of course, the first instinct of Natalie's wounded pride would be to find Réné De Land——"

"I feared that."

"To-day I heard from De Chambord. Réné received his papers from the State Department in Washington on Saturday, and has orders to report at once to the Paris Embassy. He is in New York now—where, I don't know—but he and Natalie are together by this time. She probably wired him before she left Habberton. Natalie would not go to an hotel. She hates the very thought of one. You will find her in one of two places—either at the house in Fifty-sixth Street, or else—on the *Alicia*."

"The *Alicia*!"

"Yes. The yacht has been lying in the Hudson since Friday, awaiting orders."

He stared at her in amazement, her reasoning seemed so unerring. Women, he knew, had the faculty of divining things rapidly, if with more or less inaccuracy, but the keenness of her intuition galvanized him into immediate activity.

"What makes you think she is with him?" he asked, starting up.

She shrugged. "How does one woman know another? By putting herself in the other woman's place. It is what I—what I would have done when Jack first flitted off with Bertha——" there was a lift of her lips—"if there had been any one to go to. You see, I didn't know *you* then."

"No," he said, scowling. "And I'm not De Land, either."

"In such circumstances, a woman doesn't stop to consider the character of the refuge she seeks. All she wants is a chance to strike back. Of course, since Natalie loves you, obviously she can't love Réné. Don't let the thought of that dismay you. You must go at once, and take her away from him. You haven't any time to spare. They have probably been together for at least an hour or two. You've stayed here too long already."

She was standing before him, the dim light from the shaded lamps casting soft shadows into her wistful eyes. Her expression was very sweet and winning. He felt a great tenderness for her, the same that a big brother might have for a little sister who guides him,

with the vast wisdom of innocence. He knew by the storm that had raged in him all day, that there was no room in his heart for any one but his wife, but the tie that had been established between these two was too strong to be so quickly broken. At her gesture of dismissal, he took a step to her side, and caught her hand to his lips.

"You can't let me go out of your life like this," he whispered. "I will not go—nor shall Natalie. I am coming back to you and will bring her with me. Things will be the same as they have always been."

She withdrew her hand, shook her head slowly, her gaze turned toward the floor.

"No," she said, "things will never be as they have been—with you, or Natalie, or me. You and Natalie are playing at hide and seek amid the roses of romance. I did that, too, once. It is a beautiful game—the sweetest ever invented. What does a thorn or two matter, if you catch her at last, out in the scented thoroughfare? Take her by the hand, Brooke, and hold her fast, fast as you would have her hold you, for there are fewer roses outside the garden, and more thorns. I know. And you will meet others who will not play fair." She stopped abruptly, and gave him her hand. "You must go now, Brooke. Good-by."

He bent over her hand and touched it gently with his lips.

"You are the kindest, gentlest woman I have ever known. It makes me happy to think you could have cared for my friendship. Whatever you think is right I will do, for you have given me cleaner ideals of

friendship and duty than I have ever had before. Often you have tried to deceive me, but I have always known what you were. Nothing in the world can ever make me forget you—nothing can deny my right to come to you, if ever you should need me."

"I shall not need you, Brooke. Jack and I are going to make a new start in life."

There was a pause.

"Good-by. Will you kiss me?" he said. "I'd like you to, if you don't mind."

He bent forward, and she touched him lightly with her lips. He made her look in his eyes, so that she could see how soft was her own image there, then bent again and kissed her tenderly on the brow.

She quivered a little at the touch of his lips, then brushed her hand across her eyes, and released herself. "Now go," she whispered. "Go to Natalie."

Without a word he turned and went out of the door, stopped a moment in the hallway to look at his watch, and then hurried out to the break-cart.

"Habberton Station," he ordered, "in a hurry."

At the turn just outside the gates of Long Point, the break-cart passed the glaring lights of Gerry Schuyler's limousine car, which was bringing Jack Kempton to Long Point.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP RIVER

MRS. KEMPTON'S rapid inductions had not erred. Natalie and Réné De Land had dined alone, upon the *Alicia*, and now sat over their coffee and Réné's cigarette, awaiting the final departure of the steward. Natalie's cheeks glowed with two red patches, as though they were daringly artificial, and her eyes sparkled strangely. But she had eaten little and drank sparingly. Neither of the two had dressed for dinner, for they had met at a hotel uptown, and had driven in Natalie's machine directly to the pier. She had offered him no explanation, and he was clever enough to know from her mood, that it would have been futile to ask questions. It was Réné's tact that had won him a way in the service of the State Department, from an obscure consular clerkship, to his present appointment—a short career, in which his appreciation of the foibles of women had taken a conspicuous share, and so he was wise enough to be thankful for his good fortune, without questioning Providence too closely. When Natalie was more composed she would tell him what he wanted to know, and in the meanwhile, it was his mission to be cheerful and patiently wait. He beguiled her with the

latest gossip from Washington, told her a few amusing incidents, in the recent career of a newly-arrived Western senator, and made known his own plans for the immediate future; to all of which she listened, asking perfunctory questions, answering shortly, with nervous nods and gestures. He had guessed from her telegram that she was disturbed, but he had not yet divined the cause. He only knew that after he had almost given up hope of winning her, she had sent for him to come, and was now with him alone. Réné was a philosopher and an epicure. The dinner hour was sacred to the comforts of the body, and he refused to be diverted from the pleasant business of the moment by disturbing discussions. The dinner was admirable, well served, and the handsomest woman in New York was his *vis-à-vis*. What more could the soul of man require? The gods were good. It meant something that Natalie had flown to him—how much he could not yet decide. But there she was, and her presence with him alone was evidence *de facto*, which increased his confidence in the strength of his case. And so he smiled at her and sniffed at the rim of his glass of Château Yquem.

It was not until the steward had withdrawn, that he sensed the moment of confidences.

"Tell me," he murmured at last, "what is it, Natalie?"

She frowned at her coffee-cup, but smiled when she replied.

"I wanted to see you. Isn't that enough?"

"*Me voici*," he laughed. "Is that all?"

"I think so. Don't you feel flattered that, no matter

how much I dislike other people, I am always content to be with you."

"Content!" he scowled. "That's poor food for a starving man. Have you sent for me to tell me I content you? Won't you tell me why you suddenly wanted me? Something has happened. What is it?"

She refused a reply to his question, and turned the topic with a laugh.

"You don't really *look* hungry, Réné."

"I am. You've starved me all summer. Do you expect me to be content—like you? Content is a poor word. It only misses undesire by the breadth of a hair. To be content is to be provincial. Content suggests the honest husbandman, his good wife, and rustic inertia. Content is a negative term."

"And yet I'm quite positive about it," she insisted with a smile.

He laughed at that and sank to the leather cushion beside her.

"Is it because you know how irresistible your indifference is that you elude me so? What is the use of dissimulation? Why did you send for me? Can't you be honest? Don't you think you've kept me dangling long enough. When I had your wire, I thought my letter telling of my appointment and immediate departure might have aroused anew a spark of the old feeling—the spark you had that night in Fifty-sixth Street, the night before you were married. For you loved me then—I know it. You would not kiss me even—you never have—but I read what I wanted to

read in your eyes. You needed me then and you need me now. Tell me—isn't that why you sent for me?"

And still she would not reply.

"I hoped when I heard from you, that it was because you did not want to think of me going so far away without you—perhaps you had at last decided that the life you were living was intolerable—perhaps you were ready to leave all this and go abroad with me."

"I had thought of going abroad," she stammered.

He put his arm around her, and drew her close to him. "Did you?" he whispered. "And with me?"

"No. Alone." She made no effort to escape him, and lay against his shoulder, her heavy lids and lashes hiding the bright gaze of her eyes at the curtained ports. But there was nothing in the touch of her hand to encourage him, for it lay in his fingers like an inanimate thing.

"Why did you want me here, then?" he asked. "Only to tell me that?"

"I—I wanted to learn your plans—so that when I came over—I—might not miss you."

He laughed softly. "Did you think there was a danger of that? Do you suppose that if you were anywhere in Europe that I could keep away from you?" he paused and eyed her narrowly. "That wasn't what made you bring me out here on the *Alicia*."

"No. I wanted to—to have a quiet chat where we would not be disturbed."

"And to tell me that I content you," he sneered.

There was an assertiveness in his voice, which gave

her a throb. She withdrew her hand from his, and folded her arms. "Or that you don't content me—when you use that tone."

He was wise enough to recant at once, and sank forward contritely, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands. "I don't understand. There are times when I feel as though I had never known you, Natalie. Haven't I been patient? Haven't I obliterated myself all summer, and thought only of your feelings? Consented, for the sake of being near you, to every arrangement of yours that might save you from gossip, stood in the background like a foolish college boy? Bored myself to extinction with your friends, waiting for chances to see you alone—chances which never seemed to come? There isn't another woman in the world who could have made me do what I have done for you—just to be near you, that's all—just to hear the sound of your voice, or get the reward of a grateful glance from your eyes."

He felt the light touch of her hand on his shoulder, and looked up to find her smiling kindly.

"Yes, Réné dear, you have been an angel," she said. "Don't change now. I want your affection more than ever. Don't let us quarrel—not to-night. Won't you be generous again? It is hard to be patient when everything seems so hopeless. Doesn't it make you happier to think that we may be together again far away from New York?"

He stared gloomily at her. "Together?" he asked bitterly. "We are together now, and yet we are not nearer than we have been before. Don't you think

I deserve a little more of your confidence—more faith and tenderness?"

"I've given you faith. Tenderness—tenderness means many things. I can't give you the kind of tenderness you want—I can't give you what does not belong to me, but I will reward you, Réné—soon. I have reached the limit of endurance—the very limit." She paused, and he waited. "I will never willingly see *him* again," she said stiflingly. "Nor *her*," she added.

Réné's twinge of delight did not show on the face he turned to her.

"You have learned that what I said was true?" he ventured sagely.

"Yes, yes. It is true. I thought it was too odious to be true, but it is—horribly so. Oh, don't ask me to tell you. I will not speak of it. I want to get away from it all—away from New York, where I can forget the whole hideous travesty."

"And then?" he asked.

"And then—divorce," she said harshly, "as soon as it can be managed. Divorce—absolute—final. It is the only thing that will satisfy me—so that I will not bear his name, or have anything about me that can remind me of my insults, or his infamy." There was a sullen lowering of her brows, and a set look at her lips, which drew her face in ugly lines. "I'm going to consult some one at once," she went on rapidly. "That was what I wanted to ask you about. Do you know who can help me? I thought I might live quietly abroad for a time."

"Why not come at once?"

"I will—soon, when I find what I must do."

De Land had taken one of her hands again, and while she talked was patting it gently. This time his touch seemed to sooth her, for she lay back against the bulkhead quietly, and he felt a pressure of her hand in response to his own.

"Let me manage it for you," he said. "These matters are arranged every day. It is possibly the simplest legal proceeding in the world. Modern civilization has required it, Natalie. You are taking it too hard. Your pride is hurt——"

"My pride—yes, hurt to the death—the woman—my best friend."

"It is a mistake to have best friends."

He stopped, and then questioned suddenly, "Will he consent without trouble, or will it be necessary to tell the facts?"

"I hope he will consent, but if he refuses, I will not stop at half measures. I will threaten him with her," she muttered bitterly. "Perhaps he will assent quietly to save the woman. Otherwise, she must take the consequences. I would like to see her punished. I will not care if the whole world knows of it." There was a savage glitter in her eyes and a flush at her cheeks that made her worth looking at. De Land had never seen her so handsome. He wanted her that moment as he had never wanted another woman. His clasp on her hand grew firmer.

"It's not too late to begin again, Natalie. Before long you will forget there ever was such a man as

Brooke Garriott. What can such a man know of the heart of a woman like you? He belongs to the soil—a mole, who can only do the thing to which he is born. You belong in another sphere—of music, art, culture, gayety. Even in New York you have not lived. Paris is the only city in the world. I can offer you something now—the entrée to any court in Europe. I could have had a legation in the East, if I had wanted it, or South America. But I thought of you, and chose a secretaryship to be in Paris. Think, Natalie dear, what that means to you—and to me—the sumptuous life of the gayest capital in Europe, the contact with its most brilliant minds, in a place where refinement counts for something, where subtlety is understood. I want that world to see you. You will have it at your feet. Doesn't the thought appeal to you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes."

"Don't be unhappy, Natalie. What can you care for *them?* There's no use crying over mistakes. Of course, you're sorry for Abby. So am I sorry. I've been sorry for her for a long time, because it was clear she had lost her head over him at the beginning. I don't blame her for loving him—any more than I can blame you for loving me. She is merely unfortunate."

"As I am unfortunate."

She did not mean what he thought she meant, but he went on blindly.

"What does the world matter? If I were a woman and loved a man, I'd live with him. There's a higher

law than the quibbling of ministers and courts. I've waited for you patiently because I respected you, and because I knew my opinions were too radical—that you would not be willing to agree——"

"No, Réné," she smiled. "I am not willing to agree—not to that. That pose of yours is picturesque. It has always been amusing, but I've never been foolish enough to take it seriously. You would like a kingdom of sentimental chaos. How quickly you would tire of the love of woman if it was to be had everywhere, for the asking!"

"It *is* to be had everywhere, but I can never think of any woman but you. I am not a child. I've found my way about the world for over thirty years. There's only one woman in it, only one." She drew closer to him, but as his lips touched her, she sprang away.

A dark red colored his brow as he straightened. De Land was a man who timed his psychological moments with a rare artistic precision. To one of his training, to be out of one's poise was to be a failure. Awkwardness to Réné was a more palpable sin than any forbidden in the decalogue. It seemed impossible that he could have again made a mistake, and this time her elusiveness maddened him. He got up and faced her angrily.

"Do you think I'm a dunce?" he said brutally. "What on earth do you mean? Is my kiss so repellant? Is my touch so polluting?"

She held out her hands: "Don't, Réné, don't!"

But the blow to his self-esteem stung him viciously, and his much-vaunted patience flew to the winds.

"I'm not in a mood to be trifled with. For months I've given you the best that was in me. I've hung on your wishes like a doting imbecile. I always knew that wasn't the way to treat with a woman, but I did it because I thought you were different from the others—that you'd have the sense to see how much it was costing me. But you didn't. You've taken advantage of my forbearance and treated me without consideration. I've given and given and received nothing in return—why even *he* has had more than I have. He was cleverer than I, because he had the sense to take what belonged to him."

He leaned with one hand on the table between them, and she listened to the unfamiliar ring in his voice in troubled silence.

"I've been a fool over you. When a woman like you guards her lips so sacredly, it is because she knows that if she yields them to one man, she can never give them to another, or because——" he lowered his voice and went on rapidly—"because she has reasons of her own, more important—because she fears for herself—for the disruption of all the orderly ideas of girlhood."

"René!"

He went on heedlessly. "The world says you are cold, Quakerish, insensible. I have known other women who created the same impression. Do you think I could be as mad about you as I am, if I had not gauged the real depths of your nature—yes, even better than you have yourself. Every woman is born to be won—some in one fashion, some in another—if

not in a conventional way, in one not so conventional. I've stood too long on ceremony. I've been generous long enough. I won't give any longer. I want you to kiss me, Natalie. I want you to let me take you in my arms, and tell you what love means to me."

She hid her face in her hands, and that angered him again. He came a step nearer. "If you won't give—I will take."

At the words she looked up at him in dismay. He was transformed. His polish was gone, the veneer stripped off, revealing the ugly grain beneath. It was another Réné. She remembered the hot temper of his youth, which in his manhood he seemed to have conquered. She examined him curiously, not frightened yet, only very perturbed and distressed, for they had been friends many years, and she could not think of him as of an enemy.

"You will not kiss me, if I am unwilling to be kissed," she said gently.

"I will," he muttered, "I'll kiss you now."

She saw that he meant it, and, really apprehensive, retreated to the door to the pantry, put her hand on the knob, and turned to him with the semblance of a smile.

"If you come nearer, I will call," she said.

It was an idle threat. He knew it, and was undeterred.

"No, you will not call. I don't think you're really in a position to make a scene. A woman doesn't escape her domestic troubles and dine alone, late in the night with her husband's enemy, without a reason. I fancy

it wouldn't sound well on the tongue of gossip—not just now, when much depends on your own probity. Besides, Natalie dear, you dislike scenes, especially before servants. You see, I know you better than you think I do. Your crew would be very much surprised. They're all very good friends of mine."

He suddenly dropped the rôle of defiance, came forward, and caught her hands away from her face. "Why do you force me to be so brutal to you? Can't you see that you have driven me to my last resources. Natalie, Natalie darling, tell me you are sorry."

His arms were around her now, but she held her head down, and one hand still intervened. She would not speak. But she felt that his strength was subduing her, and then she struggled fiercely in his arms. The sight of something she had never seen in his face filling her with fear.

"You shall not—you shall not. I will call."

But she did not call, and only fought in futile fashion in his embrace. Her struggles only made him more persistent. He knew now that, for all his knowledge of women, here was one that he did not know. The thought of his mistake, and the growing conviction that what he had said and what he was doing, had made the distances between them irreparable, maddened him, and he forced her down on the leather cushion of the seat that ran the length of the room. He did not hear the click of the lock, or the hurried turning of a knob, but when the door was flung open, he turned.

Brooke Garriott, pale and tense, stood poised like

a pale fury against the obscurity. Réné heard the awed voice of Natalie as she breathed her husband's name, and rose in time to be taken by the throat by the intruder, and hurled crashing against the wooden panelling, where he crumpled and fell in a heap to the deck. Natalie leaned back in her corner, pale and trembling from the reaction of her struggle, but her eyes followed her husband, as he moved about the room.

Brooke made no effort to approach or speak to her, but, after a glance at the man on the floor, went up and locked the door leading to the deck, and put the key in his pocket. Then he turned and faced the occupants of the room, eying the prostrate figure on the floor, which gave signs of animation.

"I suppose I ought to kill you like a dog," he said roughly, "but I won't—not just now. I want to talk to you first. Get up."

And Réné did.

CHAPTER XXVI

EXIT MEPHISTO

HE was shaken but not badly hurt. He got up, staunching the blood from a cut on his temple, and faced his enemy, but his legs swayed beneath him, and he was glad to sink for a moment on the bench.

"Natalie!" called Garriott. "Give him some wine."

She turned a startled look in her husband's direction, aware of the deep note of command in his voice, but obeyed without a question.

"You'll pay for this," De Land was muttering. "I'll fight you as a gentleman should."

But Garriott only laughed at him quietly. "Oh, no, you'll not fight me now nor at any other time, De Land. You're going ashore in a moment. I don't think we're likely to meet again."

De Land sat sopping at his forehead with a moist napkin, and he realized that his dignity, or what there was left of it, was best preserved by silence. Natalie had sunk in her corner, a silent and frightened observer. She viewed her husband's calm mastery of the situation with mingled feelings, but there was something in his very presence, in the look of his eyes, which gave her a new impression. After Réné he seemed like a demi-

god of honesty and righteous wrath. His strength had awed her, too. It seemed as though he had lifted Réné bodily by the throat, and hurled him the length of the room. She had never before witnessed such fury. But he seemed quite calm now. She watched him, as he stood above his discomfited enemy, and saw with the eyes of yesterday, how pale his face was, how drawn and tired. Whatever their own relations were, she was forced to respect his manhood and his effective defense of his honor.

But he had forgotten her and stood, his hands on his hips, before the unfortunate Réné, to whom his remarks were addressed.

"I told you once before, Mr. De Land, that I would tolerate no interference in my affairs. It seems you've chosen to disregard my warning. You're used to having your own way in some of the households of New York, but you've made a mistake. You've guessed wrong—that's all. You want my wife." He gave a short, unmirthful laugh. "Curiously enough, I want her myself. But when I've got through telling you what I'm going to, perhaps *you* won't want her."

He glanced at Natalie, and saw that her eyes were wide with a new wonder.

"Listen, both of you," he went on. "Perhaps you didn't know, Mr. De Land, that all of Mrs. Garriott's money was invested in the stock of the Clinton Trust Company." Garriott would not have caught De Land's quick glance, if he had not been looking for it. "I thought not," he went on. "Yesterday, that company failed, and Haliburton, its president, and one of the

executors of the Judson estate, having destroyed the company, destroyed himself." He paused grimly.

Natalie sat like a marble image, staring at vacancy. What was this dreadful news? It seemed as if one by one every support, spiritual and physical, was being knocked from under her. The events of the past two days, each a crisis in her life, had followed one on the other, with such rapidity that she had not had time to adjust her faculties to appreciate their meaning. The scene in the cabin seemed so unreal—so melo-dramatic. The overturned chairs, the twisted table-cloth, and spilled wine, were so unlike the usual orderly arrangement of the room, which less than a week ago had been the scene of its accustomed quiet gayety. In a way, it was impossible for her to supply the lapse of time. She heard Réné's voice again, now in a tone of sullen assurance.

"What has Mrs. Garriott's money to do with me?"

"This much, De Land. You're a poor man—almost as poor as I am. I have a natural interest in my wife's future welfare. If she chooses to leave me for you, she must get on with what you can offer her. Look at the matter squarely. You want my wife to go with you to Paris. Whether she has decided to go or not, does not matter. The thing is—have you enough for both."

De Land had risen, and leaned unsteadily on the back of a chair, but in his voice was a ring of defiance, as he regained something of his old manner.

"That," he said, "is between Mrs. Garriott and myself."

They were both aware that Mrs. Garriott had also risen, and was leaning forward, one hand on the table, the other at her breast, as though the effort of speaking cost her pain. Her voice seemed to come from a distance, and her face was ash color.

"Stop!" she stammered. "Listen to me, both of you. I will not be bartered for, as though I were a chattel—a horse or a dog. Mr. De Land is mistaken. There is nothing between—between us. Nothing. If I ever owed him anything—I have paid to-night—I have paid." She sank weakly in a chair, and glanced appealingly to her husband, who, without a word, went to the door, unlocked and opened it, and in a moment they heard his voice calling outside.

"Have the launch at the gangway at once, please. Mr. De Land is going ashore." But in that moment Réné had taken a step to the side of the girl, who was leaning forward on the table, her face hidden in her arms.

"Natalie, Natalie!" he whispered, in one last appeal, "can you forget so easily? Because I love you so madly that I——"

"Won't you go?" she sighed, without raising her head.

"You want me to leave you," he went on, "so that you can go back to *him*. It seems that it is only the man whose kisses are successful——"

"I will not listen," she sobbed again. "Go. Go!"

He straightened, and with a foreign gesture turned away. When Garriott came down again, he was standing in the middle of the room, facing the pier glass,

arranging his cravat. Réné realized that he was now playing a losing game, and that delayed departure would only add to his discomfiture. But he also knew the importance of a graceful exit. He turned once and looked at Natalie, but her face was still hidden, so he shrugged his shoulders expressively, took up his hat and stick, and turned toward the companionway, where Garriott silently waited. He stopped before Brooke, and their looks met.

"You're an inventor, Mr. Garriott?" he inquired.

Brooke made no reply, and only stared at him sombrely.

"Then, perhaps, you will do yourself, as well as me, the favor to invent a tale that will satisfy Mrs. Garriott as to the innocence of kisses."

"You——" Garriott raised a fist to strike, but De Land kept his hands down and stared jauntily. With an effort of will, Garriott relaxed his muscles and thrust his hands deep into his pockets, letting De Land pass slowly up the steps.

"Good night—pleasant dreams," said his voice. And as Garriott watched him depart, he was not sure, after all, that De Land did not have the better of the situation.

For a moment Brooke stood leaning on the brass railing, at the foot of the gangway, his eyes on the figure of the woman at the table. Pride, honor, friendship, love, fortune even, everything she valued in life, it seemed, had been swept from her in a moment by the ruthless tide of disaster. She was sobbing aloud now, piteously, like a child. It was her childishness

that more than anything, appealed to him in that moment. He could not seem to remember the Natalie of other, earlier days. Now she was just a girl—*his* girl—in trouble. The simplicity of the idea, and of the remedy, was amazing, but he did not go to her—not at once. He stood, with a frown, listening to the quick exhaust of the launch alongside, as it gathered headway, and then the faint complaining whirr of its machinery, growing less distinct in the distance. Then, with a sharp sigh of relief, he went up and locked the door again.

At the sound of her husband's retreating footsteps, Natalie stopped sobbing long enough to look up and follow him with inquiring eyes, but when he came down she was in the same position in which he had left her. She made no sound, and but for the convulsive movement of her shoulders, he might have thought that she slept. To her husband tears were less ominous than her silence, which meant self-control and repression.

He came over to her and gently spoke her name. But she would not move or raise her head.

"No, no," she murmured. "You must go away—don't come near me."

What was the sound she heard in his throat? It was inhuman. He had stooped to pick up the fallen chair, and she stole a quick glance at him. *He was laughing.* What did it mean? Then she heard his voice speaking to her. He had not gone at all away, but stood so close that she could see, between her arms,

that one of his shoes almost touched her chair under the table.

"What a dear, foolish child you are," he was saying, "what a rash, deluded, injudicious little girl, and what a lot of trouble you've been making for everybody!"

She had never been called a little girl before, or any of the other things, but he mentioned them with the casual certainty of a man with a mind bent on more serious things. He was so assured—so like he was last night, that in her mind there entered the horrible, delicious thought that perhaps there had been a mistake somewhere. She had not thought to consider the sources of her information, the facts were so damning, the circumstances so convincing. What if there were circumstances she had not considered! She had a longing to look up at him, an irresistible curiosity, which amounted almost to a craving, to learn what she could read in his face, but she only buried her head deeper in her arms, and set her lips more tightly together. She heard him go on speaking slowly, kindly, almost patronizingly.

"As to your sudden change of plans, Natalie dear, I must refer you to Mrs. Gerry Schuyler. She's a good friend of yours, isn't she? She was fully aware of Mrs. Kempton's plans and my own. Perhaps it was unfortunate that we made such an early start that morning, or that I went over for Abby in the *Vas-y*——"

"The *Vas-y*!" she cried, starting up.

"Of course, child. The *Vas-y*. It's shorter across the harbor by half an hour."

But she turned away, and would not look at him.

"And the breakfast——"

He laughed. "She was my guest—your guest, if you like. We had breakfasted together before when we rode. You didn't mind then——"

"No—that was *before*—we—you——"

"So was the day before yesterday, before *that*. You must remember," he said softly, "I have been very lonely in New York, dear. There were times when Abby Kempton was the only thing between me and desperation. She is the best friend I have, the best friend *you* have. She sent me here to find you—to-night."

"Abby—how could she know?"

"She guessed it. It was what she might have done, she said. Don't you really understand?"

She was still resolutely turned away from him. He stopped suddenly and straightened, as he realized that perhaps there were other things in her mind that weighed against him. For the moment the more important business of clearing up their own differences had made him forget the other doubts that had all day been raging in his mind. He now remembered the straits to which she was reduced and the little he would have to offer her. Her persistent impassibility made him suddenly cold with a fear, which gave his voice a chill note of subjection.

"Of course, I don't wish to recall anything unpleasant, or place you in a false position with yourself, or with me. There will be a little money left, enough to provide for you comfortably in a quiet way. Per-

haps it would suit your plans better to have that sum set aside for your own use, so that you could go alone somewhere and have your own independence. In that case, of course, I will not bother you further. I had——"

"Brooke!" She had risen, her cheeks aflame, and now put her fingers over his lips to keep the words from coming forth. He caught her in his arms, and held close to his body, holding her head up so that she could read what she wished in his eyes. He, too, learned something. She was conquered.

"You won't mind being poor?" he whispered.

"No. No. No. What does it matter?"

"Thank God for that," he gasped.

"Did you think so little of me?"

"I feared—it has been a dreadful day—I feared everything. I have only known you since Sunday, Natalie."

"Don't think of it again. Nothing matters but this. It is so—so very sweet. I was so afraid it was never to be again. Oh, Brooke, I have suffered so. You do not know what I have suffered. I have been tortured—tortured. I did not know what I did. Poor Abby! I can never look her in the face again." She held him away from her and scrutinized him again. "And you say Carol Schuyler knew? Are you *sure?*"

"Yes," he laughed. "She was up with a sick child and saw Abby go down to meet me."

"That blessed child! I'm sorry it was sick, but there never was such an ill wind to blow such a good."

"How could you have believed—after last night?"

"Was it only last night? It seems ages ago—long enough for us to be born all over again."

"We *are* born over again, into a new world, where there is nothing but hope and trust and faithfulness."

"Yes, that is true. I have learned—oh, so much. It seems as if I had never had my eyes wide open before."

"Keep them open, then. I want to see them—close. Yes, you're awake, at last. I knew—I've always known the kind of woman you were. Are you sure—sure you'll never regret? There won't be a great deal to live on——"

"I don't care. I'm richer to-night than I've ever been. I want *you*, Brooke. What is good enough for you will do for me. We will manage somehow."

"Bless you for that. I thought you'd be afraid to face the world from the beginning." He glanced curiously around the richly-furnished cabin, for he had never been aboard the *Alicia* before—and sighed.

"You can have no yachts, dear."

"I don't want them."

"Or racing machines?"

"I'm content."

"Or Greek baths——"

"I don't care." But she looked up at him anxiously. "Will 'The Grange' have to go, do you think?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid the income may not be enough——"

"It doesn't matter," she broke in, but the short catch in her breath did not escape him.

"If the town house is sold," he added, "we *might* manage."

"I don't want the town house, I only want 'The Grange'—and you." She paused, as a brilliant idea came to her. "We could close the wing and the stable, and discharge everybody but Bradley. I can make beds beautifully."

"Yes," slowly. "But you won't. You're a darling. I haven't a doubt that you could do anything in the world you wanted to. The future doesn't alarm me now, and it mustn't alarm you. We will have enough—more than enough only buys things that are unimportant. Do you understand? That is how life was meant to be."

"Yes. It makes me happy to think that something is required of me. I want to take my half—my share of your troubles, to be a part of something useful. All my life has been spent in destroying what other people have created. Can't I help?" she pleaded. "I want so to help."

He kissed her tenderly. "You are helping now—the way only a woman can help. If you believe in me, every one else must."

She smoothed the hair anxiously back from his brow. "You look very tired and pale. I have worried you terribly, and you are anxious about things."

"No," he said happily. "Not now—I——" he hesitated and looked around the room.

"What is it, Brooke?"

"Will you be angry? I think that——"

"What?"

"That what I most need is something to eat. I haven't touched a morsel since breakfast."

"Oh!" She fled from his arms and rang for the steward, and in a little while was sitting beside him while he supped as a hungry man should. There was a cold chicken, lettuce, toast and wine. Over his glass he pledged her.

"My woman—my wife!"

She remembered the quotation and understood.

There was nothing left of the supper, when they got up. It had taken them a long time, and the steward, after bringing fruit and coffee, had sleepily retired. They were as much alone as though in mid-ocean, and the rest of the universe was curiously impalpable. So their phrases were fragmentary and had to do with nothing in the world but themselves.

". . . And the Bolted Door," he was saying. "I used to sit very often late at night, and look at it—it was so cold and white, so cruel to be there where I had to look at it and wonder why the world was so unkind."

"Did you? Perhaps, after all, it had a meaning. Who knows? I loved you then, Brooke, not so much as now—not in the same way as now—but I loved you. You were the only man who had ever kissed me. That seemed to give you a kind of tragic dignity even then. I used to get the odor of your tobacco in the corridor—and sometimes——" she blushed divinely—"I used to leave the inner door open so that I could hear the sound of your footsteps. It made me happy to think you were so near me."

"And yet, you tried to make me unhappy?" he asked in wonder.

"Yes. I was so afraid you might learn that I cared for you."

"But you're glad now?"

"This is different." She smiled. "There are no complications, no money, no future, no anything—just *us*."

He drew her closer to him, and she sank lower in his arms, so that her lips were just beneath his, her eyes half-closed in the sweet languor of perfect contentment. She lay very quiet, and he kissed her tenderly.

"I am so tired," she said.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE COMMUTER

OVER in the Valhalla of the humorist (if there be such a place), the substantial shade of Oliver Judson stopped long enough in its contemplation of the instability of human institutions to raise its short arms over husband and wife, in smiling benediction. At least one of his mundane jokes had been really practical. If the rest of his life-work had come to nothing, this one success provided him with an excuse for his previous existence.

Perhaps deceased humorists retain the faculty of making living people smile. That might have accounted for the expression on Natalie's face, as she drove in the break-cart along the country road, which lay between "The Grange" and Habberton Station, one afternoon in October. She drove the break-cart because the garage was closed, and Etienne had been dismissed. But there was nothing in her expression to show that she missed the ease and comfort of the big machine. Her face was radiant, and as she reached a quiet part of the road, which ran through an arch of maple boughs, she lay back against the leather strap, her eyes on the shadowy road before her, the picture of content. Beyond, the houses of Habberton climbed the

hill, back of which was the railroad station—and Brooke.

She liked to drive up just as the train came in. At the end of the lane she heard the whistle of a locomotive, and looked at her watch. At the touch of the lash the nag swung into a trot, which brought them to the platform just as the train rolled in. There was a row of automobiles and station wagons awaiting the other commuters, but Brooke was out of the train and beside her, before she had a chance to nod a greeting to any one she knew—even if she had been looking for them. Her husband was laden with packages of various sizes. These he put in the back of the cart, got up and took the reins.

"You look very happy," she laughed.

"I am—don't I always look happy when I get home?"

"And what a lot of packages—you improvident creature. That long one looks like 'Beauties'——"

"It is—they are," he said shamelessly.

"And the smaller one?"

"Marons."

"You disobedient, delightful person. I'm going to lecture you," she began.

"Don't you want them?" he returned.

"I thought we were going to economize."

"We are—perhaps—but not on marons. I've another package."

"Another?"

"Yes, smaller." He took it from his pocket and gave it to her.

It was a small cardboard box, wrapped in paper of

a delicate tint, fastened with a red rubber band. She turned it over and over in her fingers and slipped off the wrapper. They had reached the maple lane, and he pulled the hack to a walk, preserving all the while an air of mystery.

"I know you have been doing something foolish. You have a guilty look."

She opened the cardboard box, disclosing a white velvet case, which she took out and opened. Within was a large white diamond, set in a plain gold ring.

"Oh, Brooke!"

"You wouldn't let me get one when we were engaged. It's never too late to mend. Would you mind putting it on at once?"

She tore off her left glove, and he slipped the ring on. "Does it fit?" he asked.

"Wonderfully! But it's very wrong of you. We can't afford anything like this. It must have cost at least five hundred dollars."

"It did," he said promptly. "More than that." He was very much amused, brimful of laconic deviltry, which defied analysis. Her eyes questioned, but he only looked ahead at the ears of the horse.

"Of course, it makes me very happy," she went on, "and I can't tell you how sweet of you it was to get it, but I would have been happy without it, Brooke—and I can't help thinking it was very extravagant, very foolish of you."

"Oh, no, not at all," he said, still smiling. "It's quite improper to be married without having been engaged."

She could not make him out at all, and not until they got to "The Grange" was there any explanation of the mystery.

"You're keeping something from me," she said, as they went up the stairs. "You're in the queerest mood."

"Am I? Perhaps that's because I feel queer."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing." He carefully closed the door of her room, then sat on the old-rose couch, and drew her down beside him, and began whispering mysteriously.

"I sent for Etienne to come back to-day."

"Etienne!"

"Yes, and Bertrand."

"The chef?"

He nodded. "And Leontine."

"Impossible. What do you mean?"

"I thought you were missing them."

"Brooke, I'm *not*," indignantly.

"You said the dinner wasn't good last night," he explained.

"It wasn't. I'm going to cook myself."

"I enjoy you better uncooked."

"Won't you be serious?"

"No. I want to be foolish."

"Well you *are* foolish. I've no patience with you. What did you mean by all this extravagance? I won't have those servants in the house. I don't need Leontine. She only brushes my dresses anyway. I'm going to do that myself."

He laughed quietly. It was delicious to tease her.

"I'll not speak to you, or have anything to do with you, until you give me an explanation of your extraordinary conduct." She sprang up and moved away from him. "I'm trying so hard to help you, and you won't let me. Have you suddenly taken leave of your senses?"

"I think so," he said calmly. "I've suddenly taken it into my head that I'm rich."

"Don't, Brooke!" She was really disturbed, and looked at him anxiously. So he got up and caught her by the hand.

"What would you say—if—if—it were true?"

Then she guessed.

"Oh, is it—is it true?"

He kissed her soberly. "Yes, dear. It really is. I am going to make a great deal of money. I signed my contract with the car company this morning. It has been pending for some days."

She laughed excitedly, like a child. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I couldn't. It was not certain until this morning. I've had a good chance for some time, but I was afraid to give you false hopes of plans which might not work out. That would have been worse than not having anything to tell you. It's settled now. I have their check in bank. I didn't tell you about the tests, either—the first ones weren't right, but we've been running a month now without a break. It was either my truck or a lost franchise, so they took my truck."

"Oh, I'm glad—for you."

He noted the drop in her voice.

"For me? And aren't you happy to have your comforts again?"

"I'm comfortable now."

"And to keep 'The Grange'?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

She hesitated. "It's the servants," she demurred. "They bother me. I don't want them all back."

"Why not?"

"Because we'll have to open the wing, and then—then people will be wanting to come and visit us."

He was delighted. She couldn't have said a thing that would have pleased him more.

"I believe you're actually disappointed."

"N—o—not disappointed. I want you to succeed. I've always known you would. But a return to the old conditions seems to change my point of view, and I've been making such cozy plans! Now that you've taught me what life really means, you suddenly deprive me of all opportunity to put my learning into practice."

He laughed. "Oh, no. I'm going to give you a chance to practice it on a larger scale."

"I like the small scale better."

She sighed happily and fingered her ring.

"Oh, well. I was hoping we'd be poor for a while, but I suppose I'll have to be content with affluence. Come, masterful man, and tell me how it all happened."

But he didn't until some moments afterward.

THE END

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The wild free life of an Oregon lumber camp furnishes the setting for this strong original story. Gret is the daughter of the camp and is utterly content with the wild life—until love comes. A fine book, unmarred by convention.

OLD CHESTER TALES. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Howard Pyle.

A vivid yet delicate portrayal of characters in an old New England town. Dr. Lavendar's fine, kindly wisdom is brought to bear upon the lives of all, permeating the whole volume like the pungent odor of pine, healthful and life giving. "Old Chester Tales" will surely be among the books that abide.

THE MEMOIRS OF A BABY. By Josephine Daskam. Illustrated by F. Y. Cory.

The dawning intelligence of the baby was grappled with by its great aunt, an elderly maiden, whose book knowledge of babies was something at which even the infant himself winked. A delicious bit of humor.

REBECCA MARY. By Annie Hamilton Donnell. Illustrated by Elizabeth Shippen Green.

The heart tragedies of this little girl with no one near to share them, are told with a delicate art, a keen appreciation of the needs of the childish heart and a humorous knowledge of the workings of the childish mind.

THE FLY ON THE WHEEL. By Katherine Cecil Thurston. Frontispiece by Harrison Fisher.

An Irish story of real power, perfect in development and showing a true conception of the spirited Hibernian character as displayed in the tragic as well as the tender phases of life.

THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S. By George Barr McCutcheon. Illustrated by Harrison Fisher.

An island in the South Sea is the setting for this entertaining tale, and an all-conquering hero and a beautiful princess figure in a most complicated plot. One of Mr. McCutcheon's best books.

TOLD BY UNCLE REMUS. By Joel Chandler Harris. Illustrated by A. B. Frost, J. M. Conde and Frank Verbeck.

Again Uncle Remus enters the fields of childhood, and leads another little boy to that non-locatable land called "Brer Rabbit's Laughing Place," and again the quaint animals spring into active life and play their parts, for the edification of a small but appreciative audience.

THE CLIMBER. By E. F. Benson. With frontispiece.

An unsparing analysis of an ambitious woman's soul—a woman who believed that in social supremacy she would find happiness, and who finds instead the utter despair of one who has chosen the things that pass away.

LYNCH'S DAUGHTER. By Leonard Merrick. Illustrated by Geo. Brehm.

A story of to-day, telling how a rich girl acquires ideals of beautiful and simple living, and of men and love, quite apart from the teachings of her father, "Old Man Lynch" of Wall St. True to life, clever in treatment.

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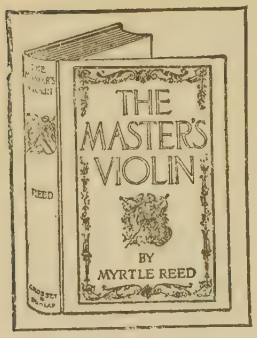
The Master's Violin

By MYRTLE REED



A Love Story with a musical atmosphere. A picturesque, old German virtuoso is the reverent possessor of a genuine Cremona. He consents to take as his pupil a handsome youth who proves to have an aptitude for technique, but not the soul of the artist. The youth has led the happy, careless life of a modern, well-to-do young American, and he cannot, with his meagre past, express the love, the longing, the passion and the tragedies of life and its happy phases as can the master who has lived life in all its fulness. But a girl comes into his existence, a beautiful bit of human driftwood that his aunt had taken into her heart and home; and through his passionate love for her, he learns the lessons that life has to give—and his soul awakens.

Founded on a fact well known among artists, but not often recognized or discussed.

If you have not read "LAVENDER AND OLD LACE" by the same author, you have a double pleasure in store—for these two books show Myrtle Reed in her most delightful, fascinating vein—indeed they may be considered as masterpieces of compelling interest.

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The Prodigal Judge

By VAUGHAN KESTER

This great novel—probably the most popular book in this country to-day—is as human as a story from the pen of that great master of "immortal laughter and immortal tears," Charles Dickens.

The Prodigal Judge is a shabby outcast, a tavern hanger-on, a genial wayfarer who tarries longest where the inn is most hospitable, yet with that suavity, that distinctive politeness and that saving grace of humor peculiar to the American man. He has his own code of morals—very exalted ones—but honors them in the breach rather than in the observance.

Clinging to the Judge closer than a brother, is Solomon Mahaffy—fallible and failing like the rest of us, but with a sublime capacity for friendship; and closer still, perhaps, clings little Hannibal, a boy about whose parentage nothing is known until the end of the story. Hannibal is charmed into tolerance of the Judge's picturesque vices, while Miss Betty, lovely and capricious, is charmed into placing all her affairs, both material and sentimental, in the hands of this delightful old vagabond.

The Judge will be a fixed star in the firmament of fictional characters as surely as David Harum or Col. Sellers. He is a source of infinite delight, while this story of Mr. Kester's is one of the finest examples of American literary craftmanship.

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A FEW OF

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THE MUSIC MASTER. By Charles Klein. Illustrated by John Rae.

This marvelously vivid narrative turns upon the search of a German musician in New York for his little daughter. Mr. Klein has well portrayed his pathetic struggle with poverty, his varied experiences in endeavoring to meet the demands of a public not trained to an appreciation of the classic, and his final great hour when, in the rapidly shifting events of a big city, his little daughter, now a beautiful young woman, is brought to his very door. A superb bit of fiction, palpitating with the life of the great metropolis. The play in which David Warfield scored his highest success.

DR. LAVENDAR'S PEOPLE. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Lucius Hitchcock.

Mrs. Deland won so many friends through Old Chester Tales that this volume needs no introduction beyond its title. The lovable doctor is more ripened in this later book, and the simple comedies and tragedies of the old village are told with dramatic charm.

OLD CHESTER TALES. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Howard Pyle.

Stories portraying with delightful humor and pathos a quaint people in a sleepy old town. Dr. Lavendar, a very human and lovable "preacher," is the connecting link between these dramatic stories from life.

HE FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS WIFE. By E. P. Roe. With frontispiece.

The hero is a farmer—a man with honest, sincere views of life. Bereft of his wife, his home is cared for by a succession of domestics of varying degrees of inefficiency until, from a most unpromising source, comes a young woman who not only becomes his wife but commands his respect and eventually wins his love. A bright and delicate romance, revealing on both sides a love that surmounts all difficulties and survives the censure of friends as well as the bitterness of enemies.

THE YOKE. By Elizabeth Miller.

Against the historical background of the days when the children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, the author has sketched a romance of compelling charm. A biblical novel as great as any since "Ben Hur."

SAUL OF TARSUS. By Elizabeth Miller. Illustrated by André Castaigne.

The scenes of this story are laid in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome and Damascus. The Apostle Paul, the Martyr Stephen, Herod Agrippa and the Emperors Tiberius and Caligula are among the mighty figures that move through the pages. Wonderful descriptions, and a love story of the purest and noblest type mark this most remarkable religious romance.

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